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THESIS

**A HALF CENTURY OF INSURGENCY: THE ONGOING
EFFORTS OF THE PHILIPPINES TO QUELL THE
INSURGENCY IN THE SOUTH**

by

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June 2018

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PHILIPPINES TO QUELL THE INSURGENCY IN THE SOUTH**

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ABSTRACT

The Southern Philippines has remained embroiled in insurgency for nearly 50 years. This thesis traces the insurgency through three distinct phases: the first two phases represent an ethno-nationalist insurgency, and the latest phase results from a qualitative shift toward a Pan-Islamic insurgency. While the Philippine government successfully ended the first two phases, the third phase of insurgency is composed of disparate groups that are linked to global jihadist organizations. Using a comparative study of Russia's counterinsurgency efforts in Chechnya, this thesis examines why the Philippine government has not yet successfully ended the decades-long insurgency. The Philippine and Chechen cases have numerous similarities, showing a comparable pattern of insurgency. However, the two countries waged drastically different counterinsurgency campaigns, and the two cases have divergent outcomes.

This thesis finds that Russia's "Chechenization" strategy, which decentralized the counterinsurgency and pushed counterinsurgency functions down to the local level, was the cornerstone of its success. In the Philippines, counterinsurgency efforts have remained mostly centralized under the armed forces of the Philippines, with no serious effort made to localize them. This suggests that the Philippines may need to consider employing a localization strategy in order to defeat the current insurgency.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	INTRODUCTION.....	1
A.	THESIS OVERVIEW	1
1.	Research Question	1
2.	Significance of the Research Question	2
3.	Thesis Roadmap	3
B.	LITERATURE REVIEW	3
C.	POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES	9
 II.	 STUDYING COUNTERINSURGENCIES	 11
A.	CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS.....	11
B.	RESEARCH DESIGN	13
1.	Key Similarities	13
2.	Key Differences	17
C.	CONCLUSION	19
 III.	 PHILIPPINES CASE STUDY.....	 21
A.	HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	21
1.	Background of the Conflict/Roots of Insurgency	21
2.	Conflict with the MNLF	24
3.	Conflict with the MILF	28
4.	Abu Sayyaf and Global Jihadist Groups	33
B.	ANALYSIS OF THE PHILIPPINES’ COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY.....	36
1.	Military Effectiveness	37
2.	Failed Peace Processes	39
3.	Effectiveness of Population Engagement/Development Projects.....	41
4.	Counterinsurgency Localization.....	44
C.	CONCLUSION	45
 IV.	 CHECHNYA CASE STUDY	 47
A.	HISTORICAL OVERVIEW	47
1.	Background of the Conflict/Roots of Insurgency	47
2.	The First Chechen War: 1994–1996.....	49
3.	The Second Chechen War: 1999–2009.....	53
B.	ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA’S COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY.....	57

1.	Causes of Failure in the First War	58
2.	Causes of Success in the Second War.....	60
C.	CONCLUSION	63
V.	FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION	65
A.	EVALUATION OF THE HYPOTHESES	65
1.	Hypothesis 1: Inadequate Resource Commitment.....	66
2.	Hypothesis 2: Political Factors/Failed Peace Agreements	67
3.	Hypothesis 3: Lack of a Coherent Counterinsurgency Strategy	68
4.	Hypothesis 4: Over-centralization of the Counterinsurgency.....	68
B.	THE LOCALIZATION EXPLANATION	69
C.	POSSIBLE PREREQUISITE CONDITIONS FOR LOCALIZATION	72
D.	CONCLUSION	73
	LIST OF REFERENCES	75
	INITIAL DISTRIBUTION LIST	83

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure 1.	Map of the Philippines.	14
Figure 2.	Map of the Russia Federation depicting Chechnya.	15
Figure 3.	Size comparison of Mindanao and Chechnya.	18
Figure 4.	Armed encounters between the MILF and GRP by year.	41
Figure 5.	Armed conflict-related deaths in Chechnya by year, 2011–2015.	57
Figure 6.	Trajectory of insurgencies in Mindanao and Chechnya.	65
Figure 7.	Effect of localization on the Chechen insurgency.	70

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LIST OF TABLES

Table 1.	Side-by-side comparison of the four hypotheses applied to the Philippines and Russia	69
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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATIONS

AFP	Armed Forces of the Philippines
ARMM	Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao
ASG	Aby Sayyaf Group
ASSR	Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic
BIAF	Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces
BIFF	Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters
GRP	Government of the Republic of the Philippines
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JP	Joint Publication
JSOTF-P	Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines
MILF	Moro Islamic Liberation Front
MIM	Muslim Independence Movement
MNLF	Moro National Liberation Front
OIC	Organization of Islamic Conference
PA	Philippine Army
PMC	Philippine Marine Corps
PNP	Philippine National Police
SZOPAD	Special Zone of Peace and Development

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I. INTRODUCTION

For nearly 50 years, the Philippines has waged a counterinsurgency against Muslim militants in the southern portion of the country. Although the Philippines has experienced periods of success in its efforts, including a peace agreement with the Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) and the establishment of the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM),¹ it has thus far failed to end the insurgency.

A. THESIS OVERVIEW

This section identifies the research question, its significance, and provides a roadmap of the thesis, outlining the overall structure and the main content of each chapter.

1. Research Question

This thesis addresses the following as the primary research question: Why have government counterinsurgency efforts failed to end the insurgency in the Southern Philippines? Thus, far, critical analyses of the counterinsurgency in Mindanao from a “whole of government” perspective are scarce. Furthermore, much of the academic research attempting to answer this question is outdated. The thesis examines this question by conducting a comparative study of the Philippine counterinsurgency from the 1970s until the present with the Russia’s counterinsurgency operations in Chechnya from 1995–2009.

In order to answer the primary research question, research for this thesis focuses of on questions that cumulatively tie into the main question. First, how is counterinsurgency success defined? Once a definition is established, a logical question is whether the Mindanao counterinsurgency has been successful or unsuccessful. Was Russia’s counterinsurgency in Chechnya successful? If successful, why? If unsuccessful, why not? After these questions are suitably answered, the next logical questions are comparative. What are the similarities between the way Russia and the Philippines conducted

¹ Zachary Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia: Insurgencies, Peace Processes, and Reconciliation*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2016), 70–74.

counterinsurgency operations? What are the differences? Finally, can these differences shed light on the reasons for the Philippines' failure to end the southern insurgency?

2. Significance of the Research Question

As a strategic ally of the United States, the security and stability of the Philippines align closely with U.S. national interests. The most recent National Security Strategy document describes the importance to U.S. strategy of the Asian region in general and the Philippines in particular.² In 2016, then-U.S. Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter further cemented the status of the Philippines as a strategic U.S. partner, announcing the “need to further enhance [the] security partnership” between the two countries.³

Counterinsurgency has been the focus of U.S. combat operations for the last 14 years, with massive counterinsurgency operations in Iraq and Afghanistan highlighting the importance of this role in the U.S. military and the importance of counterinsurgency expertise within the U.S. government. Today, counterinsurgency remains one of the military's core missions.⁴ However, the relevance of counterinsurgency study is not limited to the military. The U.S. “whole of government” approach to counterinsurgency recognizes the subordinate role of the military and the criticality of cooperative efforts between civilian and military entities.⁵

The U.S. has provided support to the Philippines for their counterinsurgency efforts and maintained a troop presence within the Philippines since 2001.⁶ The U.S.'s active

² The White House, *National Security Strategy*, February 2015, 24, <http://nssarchive.us/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/2015.pdf>.

³ U.S. Department of Defense, “Joint Press Conference by Secretary Carter and Secretary Gazmin in Manila, Philippines,” April 14, 2016, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Transcripts/Transcript-View/Article/721687/joint-press-conference-by-secretary-carter-and-secretary-gazmin-in-manila-phili/>.

⁴ Joint Chiefs of Staff, *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security* (June 2015), 11, http://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Publications/2015_National_Military_Strategy.pdf.

⁵ “Whole of government” approach to counterinsurgency refers to the military and nonmilitary means by which the counterinsurgency is conducted. This includes security operations, the political strategy, economic development, control, etc. Department of State, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* (Bureau of Political-Military Affairs, January 2009), 14–16, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/119629.pdf>.

⁶ Linda Robinson, Patrick B. Johnston, and Gillian S. Oak, *U.S. Special Operations Forces in the Philippines, 2001–2014* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2016), 17–19.

involvement, albeit in a support role, in the Philippine counterinsurgency makes this thesis a relevant and useful study. The proposed research question deals with both a location of strategic interest—the Philippines—and a subject of national security and military relevance—counterinsurgency.

3. Thesis Roadmap

This thesis is organized in five chapters. The opening chapter introduces the thesis, stating the research question, providing an overview of the argument, and reviewing the relevant literature. The second chapter gives the foundation for the comparative study by providing the definitions and pertinent counterinsurgency concepts that are necessary for an analytic framework. This chapter also explains why Chechnya makes a good comparative study for analysis alongside the Philippines, highlighting the similar characteristics of the insurgencies in the two locations and also pointing out the key differences. The third chapter contains the case study of the Philippines' Mindanao counterinsurgency. It covers the historical facts relevant to the case study and analyzes the effectiveness of the Philippines' counterinsurgency methods, specifically delving into the successes and failures of the Philippine government to end the insurgency in the South. The fourth chapter conducts a similar case study of Russia's Chechen counterinsurgency. The fifth chapter contains the comparative analysis of the two counterinsurgencies examined in the previous chapters. This chapter analyzes the areas in which the Russian and Philippine governments took similar approaches in their respective counterinsurgency strategies and the areas in which they diverged, extracting usable evidence against which the explanatory hypotheses are tested and leading to the answer to the research question.

B. LITERATURE REVIEW

Modern counterinsurgency theory draws extensively on case studies and academic analysis of various counterinsurgency campaigns to establish propositions for what makes a successful counterinsurgency. Kilcullen, one of the major contributors to U.S. counterinsurgency doctrine, identifies two fundamental principles for successful

counterinsurgency warfare. The first is finding local solutions.⁷ This involves understanding the situation at a local level and using local allies and partnerships for “locally tailored measures.”⁸ Although Kilcullen primarily describes this fundamental at the tactical level, it can be extrapolated to a broader sense to mean turning as much of the counterinsurgency fight as possible over to local entities for execution, provided that the local forces have a required level of competence.⁹

The second fundamental of counterinsurgency is respect for noncombatants. This is the core of population-centric counterinsurgency¹⁰ and involves protecting the local populace, even potentially at the expense of killing the enemy.¹¹ This approach recognizes the counter-productivity of noncombatant casualties and considers a population that feels safe to be “one of the keys to operational success.”¹²

At the strategic and operational levels of counterinsurgency warfare, U.S. doctrine gives two overarching principles essential for success. The first is the primacy of non-military means: military efforts should be nested within an integrated strategy. The *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide* states, “In counterinsurgency, military forces are, in a sense, an enabling system for civil administration; their role is to afford sufficient protection and stability to allow the government to work safely with its population, for economic revival, political reconciliation and external non-government assistance to be effective.”¹³ Schaefer expands upon this principle, positing that “insurgencies are first and foremost a *political* struggle, and therefore the military should never be the primary agency

⁷ David Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 3–4.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 4.

⁹ Yoav Gortzak, “Using Indigenous Forces in Counterinsurgency Operations: The French in Algeria, 1954–1962,” *Journal of Strategic Studies* 32, no. 2 (2009): 328–332.

¹⁰ Population-centric counterinsurgency “assumes that the center of gravity is the government’s relationship with and support among the population.” Department of State, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 14.

¹¹ Kilcullen, *Counterinsurgency*, 4.

¹² *Ibid.*, 4.

¹³ Department of State, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 15.

for conducting a counterinsurgency campaign.”¹⁴ Second, a successful counterinsurgency requires coordinated, unified efforts among all stakeholders.¹⁵ This applies between the military and civilian agencies as well as among different government agencies.

Two additional principles are pervasive throughout the counterinsurgency literature. First, counterinsurgency success depends upon the legitimacy of government in the contested area. Insurgents strive to establish their own legitimacy while degrading the legitimacy of the established government; therefore, counterinsurgency strategy must include efforts to boost the legitimacy of the local government.¹⁶ Second, counterinsurgency campaigns require adequate resources for success.¹⁷ This would seem to be an obvious point on the surface. However, counterinsurgencies usually require a massive amount of civilian and military resources, and many times governments are unwilling or unable to provide sufficient resources.

Explanations for the failure of the Philippines to end the insurgency in the South despite nearly five decades of efforts generally follow one of two different threads. The first thread deals with Philippine politics and the repeated failure of the country to reach a peace agreement with the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), the largest insurgent group in the South. Abuza documents years of attempts and failures between the Philippine government and the MILF to achieve a peace agreement. Although a peace deal framework was agreed upon by the MILF and the administration of President Aquino in 2012,¹⁸ a series of political obstacles kept the agreement from being passed by the legislature. The Philippine government still has not adopted the peace agreement, and its future remains uncertain. Abuza posits that this peace agreement holds the key to ending the insurgency,

¹⁴ Robert W. Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus: From Gazavat to Jihad* (Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger, 2011), 9–10.

¹⁵ Department of State, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 15–16.

¹⁶ This proposition is put forward by Schaefer in *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, by Gompert and Gordon in, *War by Other Means: Building Complete and Balanced Capabilities for Counterinsurgency*, and by Davidson in “Principles of Modern American Counterinsurgency: Evolution and Debate” among many others.

¹⁷ Examples of literature espousing this concept are Petraeus in *The U.S. Army/Marine Corps Counterinsurgency Field Manual*, Davidson in “Principles of Modern American Counterinsurgency,” and Ucko and Egnell in *Counterinsurgency in Crisis: Britain and the Challenges of Modern Warfare*.

¹⁸ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 87.

stating that the failed agreement brought the region “so close to a durable and lasting peace” and that “it had the power to bring peace and prosperity to the poorest part of a poor country.”¹⁹

A second analytical thread focuses on the military aspects of the counterinsurgency campaign. Literature taking this approach usually examines certain portions, battles, or eras of the counterinsurgency, looking at the military successes and failures from a tactical standpoint. Pobre and Quilop analyze the Philippine army’s 2000 operation against the MILF, conducted after President Estrada shifted the country’s counterinsurgency focus from the communist insurgency to the Muslim insurgency in Mindanao and ordered an intensive military campaign against the MILF.²⁰ Although this campaign was part of a civil-military counterinsurgency effort that included development plans in addition to military force, Pobre and Quilop concentrate their analysis on the tactical successes and failures of the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the Philippine National Police (PNP). They identify several military shortcomings during this campaign, including a misidentified enemy center of gravity, failure to obtain timely and useful intelligence, and poor messaging which degraded public relations.²¹

The Russian counterinsurgency in Chechnya provides an excellent opportunity for comparative study with the Philippine case due to key similarities. These similarities will be discussed in detail in Chapter II. In addition to the similarities, a key contrast makes Chechnya an excellent case for comparison: The Chechen counterinsurgency officially ended in 2009 while the Philippine counterinsurgency is ongoing.

Even in literature that largely provides historical narrative of the Chechen insurgency and Russia’s response, analyses of the outcome generally follow one of two disparate positions. Russia’s counterinsurgency campaign took place in two distinct periods characterized by major military operations. The first period, also called the First

¹⁹ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 110–111.

²⁰ Cesar P. Pobre and Raymund Jose G. Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One: The 2000 Campaign against the MILF* (Quezon City, Philippines: Armed Forces of the Philippines, Office of Strategic and Special Studies, 2008), 30–33.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 126–130.

Chechen War, began in 1994 and ended in 1996.²² The second period began in 1999 and lasted ten years, ending with a Russian declaration of victory in 2009.²³ The position regarding the outcome of the conflict that can be considered “conventional wisdom” holds that Russia inadequately dealt with the insurgency in the first war, but successfully quelled the Chechen insurgency by the end of the second war. This position is based upon the fact that Russia withdrew its forces from Chechnya with a declaration of victory and rendered the guerilla war fought by Chechen insurgents “all but over.”²⁴ Dannreuther and March echo this position, stating, “Russian policies towards Chechnya have succeeded, far more than is generally acknowledged outside Russia, in many of their aims. The republic is now relatively calm, is gradually being rebuilt, and is a loyal member of the Russian Federation.”²⁵ Most adherents of this position acknowledge that some of the underlying problems that lead to the Chechen insurgency still remain and that the potential for future conflict exists, with Galeotti stating that “while Chechnya may now largely be pacified, the rest of the North Caucasus is experiencing rising local nationalist and jihadist insurgency, which could yet blow back into Chechnya.”²⁶

A contrasting position contends that while Russia achieved military success and temporary political success in Chechnya by 2009, it has failed to achieve overall counterinsurgency success, and an insurgency remains festering within Chechen society, waiting for the right moment to resurface. Schaefer represents this view, stating, “The bottom line is that the Chechen insurgency is growing and has now spread to Ingushetia and Dagestan, among others. It is more accurately referred to now as the North Caucasus insurgency.”²⁷ He contends that the apparent success of Russian efforts against Chechen insurgents does not signify a successful counterinsurgency effort, but rather a transition of

²² Mark Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009* (Oxford: Osprey, 2014), 7.

²³ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 85.

²⁵ Roland Dannreuther and Luke March, “Chechnya: Has Moscow Won?” *Survival* 50, no. 4 (September 1, 2008): 107.

²⁶ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 91.

²⁷ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 7.

Chechen insurgents from a phase of overt violence to an underground phase focused on building support.²⁸

Literature that takes the position that Russia conducted a successful counterinsurgency in Chechnya generally identifies “Chechenization” of the conflict as the primary causal factor leading to success.²⁹ This term as applied to counterinsurgency success has two facets. In a military sense, Russia recognized its shortcomings in the first Chechen war and adapted in the second war by recruiting Chechens to fight the insurgents, recognizing that Chechens were best suited to conduct the counterinsurgency.³⁰ In a political sense, this term refers to Russia “co-opting (buying off) Chechen leaders and ultimately transferring the conflict from Russian to Chechen hands,”³¹ the most prominent case of which is Russia’s installation of a Chechen president who is loyal to the Kremlin but still enjoys some degree of legitimacy with the Chechen people.³²

On the other hand, the contrary view holds that Russia, by using brutal and repressive tactics to pacify Chechnya, has failed to win the hearts and minds of the people and has neglected to address the root causes that made insurgency possible, rendering it only a matter of time before the insurgency regroups.³³

A review of the pertinent literature shows varying views regarding explanations for the extended insurgency in the Southern Philippines despite decades of counterinsurgency

²⁸ In counterinsurgency theory, a Phase I insurgency is the “latent and incipient stage” in which the insurgency remains largely underground and focused on recruiting, training, and garnering support rather than overt violence. A Phase II insurgency is the guerilla warfare stage, in which the insurgency is characterized by “low-level violence such as sabotage, subversion, and terrorism while constantly attempting to mobilize the masses through propaganda.” Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 24–25.

²⁹ Examples of authors propagating this view are Mark Galeotti in *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, Jean-Francois Ratelle and Emil Aslan Souleimanov in “A Perfect Counterinsurgency? Making Sense of Moscow’s Policy of Chechenisation,” and Miriam Matejova in “Russian ‘Chechenization’ and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya.”

³⁰ Jean-François Ratelle and Emil Aslan Souleimanov, “A Perfect Counterinsurgency? Making Sense of Moscow’s Policy of Chechenisation,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 68, no. 8 (2016): 1297–1299.

³¹ Miriam Matejova “Russian ‘Chechenization’ and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya,” *International Journal on World Peace* 30, no. 2 (2013): 9.

³² Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 84.

³³ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 274–277.

efforts and also reveals a scholarly gap. Very little critical analysis of the Mindanao counterinsurgency has been performed looking at the counterinsurgency campaign from a whole of government standpoint, covering the political, civil, and military aspects. This thesis explores this knowledge gap.

C. POTENTIAL EXPLANATIONS AND HYPOTHESES

This thesis offers four hypotheses as potential answers to the research question. The first potential explanation deals with resource commitment, hypothesizing that counterinsurgency campaigns have failed to dedicate adequate resources to those efforts. During much of the time period covered by this thesis, countering the Muslim insurgency in the South remained a secondary priority behind either countering a communist insurgency that was considered to be a closer and more immediate threat to national security or focusing on external threats such as an increasingly assertive China in the South China Sea. These factors and this prioritization have prevented the Philippines from providing the military and government resources necessary for a successful counterinsurgency.

A second hypothesis attributes the failure of the counterinsurgency campaign to political factors. The Philippine government has had multiple opportunities to make lasting peace agreements with the main insurgent groups and has offered deals that the insurgent groups found acceptable, yet has repeatedly failed to enact those deals into law or uphold the government's part of the agreement. Presumably, due to the relatively contained nature of the insurgency within the country, the majority of the Philippine citizens are not directly affected by the conflict, leading to a domestic political situation in which the political support necessary to reach a peace agreement has been unattainable—despite the tactical successes of counterinsurgency forces.

A third hypothesis suggests that counterinsurgency efforts have failed because the government lacked a coherent counterinsurgency strategy. This hypothesis surmises that the absence of an overall strategy has resulted in disconnected efforts between the military and other government agencies. This disconnect has hampered efforts at all levels and prevented tactical successes from achieving strategic objectives.

A fourth hypothesis explains the lack of counterinsurgency success in terms of over-centralizing management of the conflict at the expense of localization. This explanation presumes that the Philippine government has not effectively localized counterinsurgency efforts. The central government has played too strong a role in the counterinsurgency and has not followed a “Chechenization” model such as brought Russia success in Chechnya.

II. STUDYING COUNTERINSURGENCIES

A. CONCEPTS AND DEFINITIONS

Because the terms “insurgency” and “counterinsurgency” are often incorrectly conflated with “terrorism” and “counterterrorism” or otherwise misused, clear definitions are required for a study of this subject. This thesis uses definitions of insurgency and counterinsurgency from joint U.S. military doctrine. *Joint Publication (JP) 3–14, Counterinsurgency* defines insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region. Insurgency can also refer to the group itself.”³⁴ *JP 3–14* defines counterinsurgency as “comprehensive civilian and military efforts designed to simultaneously defeat and contain insurgency and address its root causes.”³⁵ *JP 1–02, Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms* defines terrorism as “the unlawful use of violence or threat of violence, often motivated by religious, political, or other ideological beliefs, to instill fear and coerce governments or societies in pursuit of goals that are usually political”³⁶ and defines counterterrorism as “activities and operations taken to neutralize terrorists and their organizations and networks in order to render them incapable of using violence to instill fear and coerce governments or societies to achieve their goals.”³⁷ Therefore, while insurgent groups may use terrorism to further their goals, “insurgency” and “terrorism” have distinct meanings. Using the above definitions, the militant groups in both Chechnya and Mindanao during the period of study for this thesis fall firmly under the “insurgent” label. In addition, as will be clearly shown in the case study chapters, campaigns waged by both the Russian and Philippine governments in response to their respective militant groups may be accurately considered “counterinsurgencies.”

³⁴ Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 3–24: Counterinsurgency*, November 2013, G-5, http://www.dtic.mil/doctrine/new_pubs/jp3_24.pdf.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Joint Staff, *Joint Publication 1–02: Department of Defense Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, February 2016, 241, https://fas.org/irp/doddir/dod/jp1_02.pdf.

³⁷ Ibid., 54.

Equally important to defining counterinsurgency, yet significantly more difficult, is clearly defining counterinsurgency success. Unlike more conventional conflicts or major wars, counterinsurgencies are rarely ended with a formal surrender, peace accords, or armistice agreements. As such, finding a clear line of delineation between counterinsurgency success and failure and even finding good counterinsurgency performance metrics can prove challenging. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, Admiral Michael Mullen captured the difficulty of identifying counterinsurgency success, stating, “success in these types of [counterinsurgency] wars is iterative, not decisive...Quite frankly, it will feel a lot less like a knockout punch and a lot more like recovering from a long illness.”³⁸ Given the general lack of a clear-cut end to counterinsurgencies, it is unsurprising that many counterinsurgency operations conclude with controversy over whether or not they were successful.

Although defining counterinsurgency success may not eliminate all controversy, doing so provides an analytical basis for conducting counterinsurgency case studies. This thesis defines counterinsurgency success by drawing on the *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, which describes success as the “marginalization of the insurgents to the point at which they are destroyed, co-opted or reduced to irrelevance in numbers and capability.”³⁹ Using this definition, the success or failure of counterinsurgency efforts will be determined by the state and capability of an insurgency at a given point in time and the presence or lack of a subsequent period of peace, without regard to speculation about whether or not an insurgency may spring up in later generations. If an insurgency has been rendered ineffective, and if the future carries a reasonable expectation of peace, the counterinsurgency effort will be considered successful. As the subsequent chapters will demonstrate, the above criteria lead this thesis to characterize Russia’s Chechen counterinsurgency as successful and the Philippines’ Mindanao counterinsurgency as unsuccessful thus far.

³⁸ Michael Mullen, Landon Lecture, March 3, 2010, <https://www.k-state.edu/landon/speakers/michael-mullen/transcript.html>.

³⁹ Department of State, *U.S. Government Counterinsurgency Guide*, 4.

B. RESEARCH DESIGN

Counterinsurgencies are inherently complex endeavors; therefore, determining the reasons for success or failure of a counterinsurgency can be difficult. Often, evidence can be interpreted in multiple ways, and the number of variables can make identification of causal mechanisms a challenge. Because of this complexity, the most appropriate analytical approach for this thesis is to conduct a comparative case study, allowing the researcher to draw cause and effect inferences from patterns found across multiple conflicts. This thesis draws upon evidence from the Chechnya case in order to compare with the Philippine case and determine such patterns.

For a comparative study to be useful, the cases must be similar enough to enable the identification of patterns. However, analysis must also take into account differences between cases in order to avoid faulty inferences.

1. Key Similarities

Despite Chechnya and Mindanao being located in different regions of the world—with the Philippine island of Mindanao located in Southeast Asia and Chechnya located in the North Caucasus region of Eastern Europe—a number of striking similarities in the respective insurgencies of those two areas make them well-suited for a comparative counterinsurgency study. First of all, insurgencies in both Chechnya and the Philippines⁴⁰ are confined to a specific geographic area within the respective countries. Mindanao, the second largest Philippine island,⁴¹ is located in the far south of the Philippine archipelago, as depicted in Figure 1. The Chechen Republic, generally referred to as Chechnya, occupies a position in the southwest corner of the Russian Federation, as shown in Figure 2.

⁴⁰ The insurgency referenced here specifically refers to the Muslim insurgency in the Southern Philippines. The long-standing communist insurgency has historically affected a greater portion of the Philippines.

⁴¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, s.v. “Mindanao,” accessed May 7, 2018, <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mindanao>.



Figure 1. Map of the Philippines.⁴²

⁴² Adapted from Central Intelligence Agency, "Philippines," web image, accessed April 17, 2018, <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/graphics/maps/rp-map.gif>.



Figure 2. Map of the Russia Federation depicting Chechnya.⁴³

Both insurgencies have religious underpinnings, with Islam as the predominant religious driver. Writing of the Chechen insurgency, Schaefer states, “From [the late eighteenth century] forward every Chechen insurgency movement (rebellion/insurrection) would be fueled, at least in part, by the ideology of conservative and fundamentalist Islam, and was accompanied by a call for a more stringent interpretation of Islamic Sacred Texts and law.”⁴⁴ Likewise, Islam has played a significant role in insurgent movements and uprisings in Mindanao throughout modern history.⁴⁵

The roots of both insurgencies can be traced back several hundred years, with a resurgence of conflict being initiated in the latter half of the twentieth century. The first clash between Russia and Chechen insurgents began in 1784.⁴⁶ The conflict studied by this

⁴³ Adapted from Alexander Chubarov, web image, accessed April 17, 2018, [http://www.allrussias.com/images/bullet-Map_of_Russia_-_Chechen_Republic_\(2008-03\)_svg.png](http://www.allrussias.com/images/bullet-Map_of_Russia_-_Chechen_Republic_(2008-03)_svg.png).

⁴⁴ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 56.

⁴⁵ Naoyuki Ochiai, “The Mindanao Conflict: Efforts for Building Peace Through Development,” *Asia-Pacific Review* 23, no. 2 (2016): 37–39.

⁴⁶ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 12–21.

thesis began in 1994. In Mindanao and the nearby islands, clashes between Moros⁴⁷ and Spanish forces seeking to subdue the region began in 1578 during the Spanish occupation of the Philippines.⁴⁸ The modern insurgency commenced in 1972 with the armed rebellion of the MNLF.⁴⁹

Conflicts in both Mindanao and Chechnya began as a quest for territorial autonomy and/or independence, and both were later influenced to some extent by actors attempting to turn the conflict into part of a greater global jihad. Bodansky details how, in the 1990s, Islamists in Chechnya began attempting to coopt the insurgency in the name of global jihad.⁵⁰ In the Southern Philippines during the 1990s, Fowler describes how splinter groups with ties to transnational jihadist organizations broke off from what was largely an ethno-nationalist insurgency, transforming the insurgency into one with Islamist objectives that went beyond mere territorial autonomy.⁵¹

The location of both insurgencies fell within economically depressed areas of their respective countries. Abuza refers to Mindanao as “the poorest part of a relatively poor country,”⁵² and regarding Chechnya, Matejova writes that “the economic and social situation appears to be grim.”⁵³

The terrain in both Chechnya and Mindanao favors insurgents and poses a significant military obstacle to counterinsurgency forces. Much of Chechnya is mountainous and thickly forested, creating an environment that Galeotti refers to as

⁴⁷ The term “Moro” encompasses all the various Muslim tribes in the Southern Philippines. The use of this term goes back to the Spanish colonial era, when the Spanish named the Muslims in that region “Moors,” from which the word Moro is derived. Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 65.

⁴⁸ James R. Arnold, *The Moro War: How America Battled a Muslim Insurgency in the Philippine Jungle, 1902–1913* (New York, Bloomsbury Press: 2013), 5.

⁴⁹ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 69.

⁵⁰ Yossef Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 32–43.

⁵¹ Mike Fowler, “Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now” *Small Wars Journal* (January 18, 2011), <http://smallwarsjournal.com/blog/journal/docs-temp/651-fowler.pdf>.

⁵² Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 69.

⁵³ Matejova, “Russian ‘Chechenization’ and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya,” 15.

“perfect bandit and guerilla country.”⁵⁴ Rugged jungle characterizes Mindanao and the rest of the Southern Philippines, causing significant challenges for military forces and making counterinsurgency operations difficult.⁵⁵

Finally, insurgent groups in both cases received limited but notable support from outside actors. In the 1990s, the Taliban regime in Afghanistan sent fighters and provided financial support to the Chechen insurgency.⁵⁶ Chechen insurgents also received support, most notably in the form of foreign fighters, from the Al Qaeda organization.⁵⁷ Libya openly supported the Moro insurgency in the 1970s, “providing significant training and arms to the MNLF.”⁵⁸ Moro rebels also obtained support from the Malaysian state of Sabah’s governor, who provided both arms and sanctuary.⁵⁹ In more recent times, the MILF received training from Al Qaeda terrorists.⁶⁰

2. Key Differences

Although the similarities in the Philippine and Chechen cases provide an excellent opportunity for a comparative study, no two cases are exactly alike. These cases do have some important differences that must be recognized. Foremost is the contrast between Chechnya and Mindanao in both size and scale. Mindanao is about five times the size of Chechnya, with a land area of roughly 37,000 square miles⁶¹ to Chechnya’s roughly 7,500 square miles.⁶² Figure 3 graphically depicts the land area difference between the two. Mindanao also represents a far larger portion of the Philippines than Chechnya does to the Russian Federation (see Figures 1 and 2). From 2015 census figures, Mindanao has a

⁵⁴ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 7.

⁵⁵ Preeti Bhattacharji, “Terrorism Havens: Philippines,” *Council on Foreign Relations, Backgrounder* (2009). <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/terrorism-havens-philippines>.

⁵⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 77.

⁵⁷ Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*, 41.

⁵⁸ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 69–77.

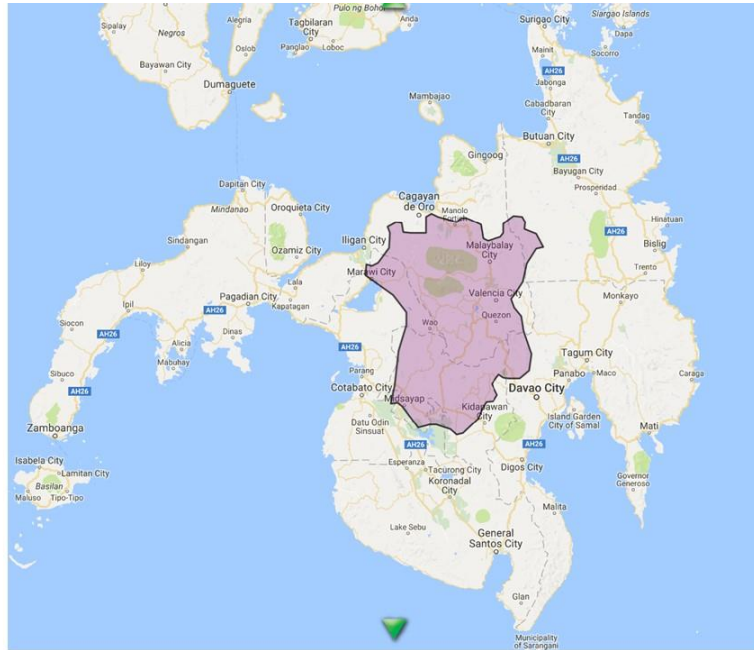
⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ *Encyclopedia Britannica*, “Mindanao,” <https://www.britannica.com/place/Mindanao>.

⁶² *New World Encyclopedia*, s.v. “Chechnya,” accessed May 7, 2018, <http://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Chechnya>.

population of about 24 million,⁶³ and the Autonomous Region of Muslim Mindanao (ARMM) has a population of about 3.8 million.⁶⁴ Chechnya's 2015 population stood at 1.4 million.⁶⁵



The shaded area represents Chechnya, superimposed over the island of Mindanao for comparative purposes.

Figure 3. Size comparison of Mindanao and Chechnya.⁶⁶

Unsurprisingly, Russia has far more military capability, in both size and technology, than the Philippines. In 2015, Russia's total armed forces numbered nearly 1.5 million, while the Philippines' armed forces totaled 165,500.⁶⁷ Equally disparate between

⁶³ Philippine Statistics Authority, "Philippine Population Surpassed the 100 Million Mark (Results from the 2015 Census of Population)," June 30, 2017, <https://psa.gov.ph/population-and-housing>.

⁶⁴ Philippine Statistics Authority, "Population of the Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao (Based on the 2015 Census of Population)," June 10, 2016, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/population-autonomous-region-muslim-mindanao-based-2015-census-population>.

⁶⁵ Liz Fuller, "Is Chechnya Facing Demographic Decline?" Caucasus Report, July 11, 2016, <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-chechnya-declining-birth-rate/27852489.html>.

⁶⁶ Adapted from Sunflower Education, Web-based Mapping Tool, www.overlapmaps.com.

⁶⁷ World Bank, "Armed Forces Personnel, Total," <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1>.

the two countries is total military spending, with Russia's 2015 military expenditures totaling nearly \$35 billion compared to less than \$4 billion for the Philippines.⁶⁸

The ethnic composition of Chechnya and Mindanao provides another important difference. Chechnya's ethnic makeup is relatively homogenous, and Twigg states that "Chechnya is [Russia's] Muslim region with the strongest degree of homogeneity, with 93.47% of its population ethnic Chechen."⁶⁹ By contrast, the Moros in the Southern Philippines are a diverse people, with Abuza pointing out that the Moros have "three major linguistic and ten minor linguistic groups along with distinct ethnic differences."⁷⁰ The Maranaos, the Tausugs, and the Maguindanaons comprise the main ethnic groups.⁷¹

C. CONCLUSION

In order to effectively study causal factors of success or failure in the Mindanao counterinsurgency, this thesis uses the comparative study method, with the Chechen counterinsurgency selected as the comparison case. Insurgencies in both Chechnya and Mindanao take place in specific territories within Russia and the Philippines. Counterinsurgency forces in both locations face geographic obstacles, with terrain that is favorable to guerilla forces. Both insurgencies can be traced to conflicts originating centuries ago, and both have Islamic underpinnings. Both follow a similar pattern of beginning as a quest for independence or autonomy, and later, through outside support from foreign elements, being infused with actors attempting to transform the insurgencies into part of the global *jihad*.

The Philippine and Chechen cases do have notable differences that must be taken into account for an accurate analysis. Mindanao is significantly bigger, takes up a much larger portion of its parent country, and is more populous than Chechnya. Russia has far more military resources with which it may employ in counterinsurgency efforts. Unlike

⁶⁸ Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, "SIPRI Military Expenditure Database," <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex>.

⁶⁹ Judyth Twigg, "Differential Demographics: Russia's Muslim and Slavic Populations," *PONARS Policy Memo No. 388* (December 2005), 133–140.

⁷⁰ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 65.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 66.

Chechnya, which is largely ethnically homogenous, Mindanao is ethnically and linguistically diverse, posing unique counterinsurgency challenges.

Despite the differences described above, the two cases show many similar patterns. Most importantly, the two cases have different outcomes, making them ideal for comparative analysis of causal factors.

III. PHILIPPINES CASE STUDY

This thesis examines the Philippines' counterinsurgency in Mindanao and the nearby Sulu Archipelago as an effort against a greater Moro insurgency, rather than solely focusing on actions against an individual insurgent organization. Although the insurgency manifests itself in the form of named organizations, these organizations, while disparate, comprise a greater insurgency, whereby the elimination of a single insurgent group would not result in the elimination of the insurgency or in overall counterinsurgency success. The modern insurgency can be divided into three distinct periods. The Moro National Liberation Front (MNLF) dominated the first period, which was 1972–1996. The second period, 1996–2012, was dominated by the Moro Islamic Liberation Front (MILF), which broke away from the MNLF. The third period, 2012 to the present, saw the rise of a number of groups, many of which splintered out of the MNLF or MILF. The insurgency of this period was qualitatively different from that of previous periods in that, whereas the MNLF and MILF's objectives were independence or autonomy, the newer insurgent groups are linked to the global *jihad* and have aspirations of a Pan-Islamic state.

A. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Although this thesis focuses on the insurgency that began in the 1970s, the current conflict in Mindanao is the latest iteration of a series of conflicts that go back hundreds of years. This section discusses the historical events that precipitated the modern insurgency and studies the modern insurgency from the beginning of conflict in 1972 until the present.

1. Background of the Conflict/Roots of Insurgency

The roots of the Moro insurgency can be traced back to the sixteenth century, when Spanish *conquistadors* attempted to extend their colonial rule of the Philippines to the island of Mindanao. Conflict between Spain and the Muslims of the Southern Philippines began in the 1560s.⁷² Having conquered Luzon and the Visayas—the northern and central

⁷² Steven Rogers, "Beyond the Abu Sayyaf: The Lessons of Failure in the Philippines," *Foreign Affairs* 83, no. 1 (2004): 16.

islands of the Philippines—and found success in Christianizing the populations of those islands, Spain set its sights upon the Southern Philippines, seeking to conquer and Christianize the Muslims of Mindanao and the Sulu Islands.⁷³ The Spanish met with fierce resistance. Although the Muslims of the Southern Philippines were composed of a diverse set of tribes and ethnicities and had no unified state,⁷⁴ the invasion of the Spanish brought them loosely together against a common enemy.⁷⁵ Spain found the Muslims so resistant to missionary efforts that the Spanish placed the Muslims of Mindanao in a different category from the rest of the Filipinos, labelling them “Moros” after the Muslim Moors of Spain.⁷⁶

Conflict between Spain and the Moros lasted for over 300 years and wreaked devastating havoc upon the Moro communities.⁷⁷ Spain never managed to fully conquer the Moros, whose struggle against their would-be colonizers has been called “one of the most remarkable resistances in the annals of military history.”⁷⁸ However, as one result of the protracted conflict, Arnold points out that “Moro society largely developed in isolation from the rest of the Philippines,”⁷⁹ creating a rift in Philippine society that would have implications far into the future.

The United States assumed control of the Philippines in 1898 following the Spanish-American War. Although the United States, in contrast to Spain, did not attempt to Christianize the Moros,⁸⁰ the Moros still fiercely resisted American rule, sparking a bloody guerilla war between American forces and the Moros that lasted from 1902–1913.⁸¹

⁷³ Ochiai, “The Mindanao Conflict,” 38.

⁷⁴ Various Sultanates in Mindanao and the Sulu Islands gained a great deal of power, but none of them was able to unify all the Muslims.

⁷⁵ Arnold, *The Moro War*, 5–6.

⁷⁶ Patricio N. Abinales and Donna J. Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2005), 50.

⁷⁷ Ochiai, “The Mindanao Conflict,” 38.

⁷⁸ Vic Hurley, *Swish of the Kris: The Story of the Moros* (Salem, OR: Cerberus Books, 2010), 16.

⁷⁹ Arnold, *The Moro War*, 6.

⁸⁰ Ochiai, “The Mindanao Conflict,” 38.

⁸¹ Robert A. Fulton, *Moroland: The History of Uncle Sam and the Moros 1899–1920* (Bend, OR: Tumalo Creek Press, 2016), 4–6.

The U.S. counterinsurgency campaign succeeded in pacifying the Moros,⁸² and a period of relative peace ensued in Mindanao for nearly a half century. However, the United States, during its period of rule, governed Mindanao as a separate entity from the remainder of the Philippines,⁸³ continuing the pattern of a divided Philippine society.

The U.S. established the Commonwealth of the Philippines in 1935 as a precursor to full Philippine independence, and an indigenous government began to replace the territorial government of the United States.⁸⁴ Rather than heal the divide between the Moros and the rest of the Filipinos, the Commonwealth government took actions that served to deepen the rift. President Quezon implemented policies intended to transplant Filipinos from the Northern Philippines to Mindanao, resulting in a massive influx of Christians into areas previously dominated by Muslims.⁸⁵ The Moros saw this demographic shift as a threat, and it helped fuel a bitter distrust between the Moros and the Philippine government.⁸⁶ So deep was the societal rift at this point, that Muslim leaders in Mindanao and Sulu petitioned the United States to keep their provinces under American rule rather than be placed under control of the Philippine government.⁸⁷ After the Philippines gained full independence in 1946, the resettlement of Christians to Mindanao continued. Land reform measures enacted by the Philippine government again drove a massive influx of Christians into Mindanao, resulting in a relatively small portion of Mindanao remaining Muslim-majority.⁸⁸

⁸² Rogers, "Beyond the Abu Sayyaf," 16.

⁸³ Ibid.

⁸⁴ Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict," 38–39.

⁸⁵ Wurfel states, "In the three decades before the war nearly 300,000 Christians settled in the provinces of Lanao and Cotabato alone. Two dozen Christians had lived in the fertile Kapatagan Valley of Lanao in 1918; by 1941, there were 8,000, outnumbering the native Maranao. It was little wonder that Muslims felt threatened." David Wurfel, *Filipino Politics: Development and Decay* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1988), 30.

⁸⁶ Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict," 38–39.

⁸⁷ Lawrence Cline, "The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines," *Small Wars and Insurgencies* 11, no. 3 (Winter 2000), 118.

⁸⁸ Ibid., 116.

Although Mindanao experienced a period of relative peace following the war with the Americans, government policies during this period stoked tension and fueled grievances among the Muslim population. In the late 1960s, tensions reached a boiling point, and insurgency once again erupted in the early 1970s in a conflict that to date has claimed an estimated 200,000 lives and displaced an additional 1.5 million people.⁸⁹

2. Conflict with the MNLF

With tensions between the Government of the Republic of the Philippines (GRP) and the Moros already high due to the perception among Muslims that incoming Christians were stealing their land,⁹⁰ a 1968 incident called the Jabidah Massacre inflamed tensions to the breaking point. In an event still shrouded by disputed facts, a Philippine Air Force officer recruited a number of Muslims to take part in a secret program designed to train them for infiltration of the Malaysian territory of Sabah.⁹¹ The officers in charge of these recruits allegedly executed between 14 and 68 of them in a camp located in Corregidor.⁹² Reports of this incident became public, sparking the formation of the Muslim Independence Movement (MIM).⁹³ The MIM represented the first major secessionist movement to arise after World War II.⁹⁴

The MNLF emerged from the MIM in 1969, founded by an MIM member named Nur Misuari.⁹⁵ The MNLF's original objective was the establishment of an independent Moro state covering Mindanao, Palawan, and the Sulu archipelago, although it later, after pressure from the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC), changed this objective to Moro autonomy.⁹⁶

⁸⁹ Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict," 39.

⁹⁰ Fowler, "Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now," 7.

⁹¹ Michael Leifer, "The Philippines and Sabah Irredenta," *The World Today* 24, no. 1 (October 1968): 422–423.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Cline, "The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines," 119.

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ Ibid., 120.

⁹⁶ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 5.

Libya and Malaysia provided essential support to the MNLF during its early years, enabling the MNLF to attain the capabilities of a significant military organization. Libya overtly supported the MNLF, supplying it with funds, training, and arms, and the MNLF established its headquarters in Tripoli.⁹⁷ Malaysia reportedly gave logistical support to the MNLF, and the Malaysian state of Sabah provided sanctuary and training for MNLF fighters.⁹⁸

In 1972, President Marcos' declaration of martial law provided the spark that ignited all the pent-up tension into a full-scale insurgency.⁹⁹ The MNLF began the insurgency with an uprising in Marawi City, which soon escalated into a conflict of "almost civil-war proportions" throughout Mindanao and Sulu.¹⁰⁰ Marcos responded with a declaration of "total war" and the deployment of over half of the AFP to the Southern Philippines to quell the insurgency.¹⁰¹ After the fighting began, thousands of people joined the MNLF, and, in the first four years of conflict, the MNLF grew to an estimated 30,000 armed fighters.¹⁰²

The early years of the insurgency claimed thousands of lives and cost the GRP about \$1 million a day.¹⁰³ However, by 1976, momentum had clearly shifted to the counterinsurgency forces, and the MNLF began to lose effectiveness due to several factors. First, the AFP began to achieve tactical success on the battlefield. The MNLF's early strategy involved attempting to seize and hold towns or rural areas.¹⁰⁴ This strategy, because of the AFP's superior numbers and firepower, usually ended in disaster for MNLF fighters, forcing the MNLF to shift to "unconventional tactics of hit-and-run operations

⁹⁷ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 69–70.

⁹⁸ Noel M. Morada and Christopher Collier, "The Philippines: State versus Society?" in *Asian Security Practice: Material and Ideational Influences*, ed. Muthiah Alagappa (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998), 557.

⁹⁹ Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," *Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs* 3, no. 1 (2016): 66.

¹⁰⁰ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 5.

¹⁰¹ Morada and Collier, "The Philippines: State versus Security?" 557.

¹⁰² Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 69–70.

¹⁰³ Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 217.

¹⁰⁴ Cline, "The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines," 122.

and ambushes.”¹⁰⁵ Second, Malaysia drastically reduced its support, and Libya began to negotiate with the GRP.¹⁰⁶ Third, fractures began to appear within the MNLF organization, with a rift developing between MNLF military leadership in the Philippines and the MNLF organizational leadership based in Tripoli.¹⁰⁷ Furthermore, the MNLF began to split along ethnic lines, and, as a result, “the organization narrowed to a Tausug constituency.”¹⁰⁸

Following a diplomatic push with Libya and the OIC, the Philippines reached its first peace agreement with the MNLF in 1976.¹⁰⁹ This agreement, known as the Tripoli Accords, offered regional autonomy to Muslims in 13 provinces in Mindanao and the nearby islands.¹¹⁰ The “peace,” however, only lasted for a few months, as a majority of Muslims boycotted the subsequent autonomy referendum¹¹¹ and the MNLF accused Marcos of rigging the referendum and making the promised autonomy a sham.¹¹² Armed hostility resumed, but from this point on the MNLF fought as a much weaker organization than it had at its peak in the early 1970s.¹¹³

A major reason for the MNLF’s weakening was a number of splits that resulted from the 1976 peace deal, one split being particularly prominent. Unhappy with the MNLF’s compromise with the GRP, a group of Islamists splintered off from the MNLF, forming a more radical organization that would later become the MILF.¹¹⁴ Although the split was primarily driven by ideological differences,¹¹⁵ it occurred mostly along tribal and

¹⁰⁵ Cline, “The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines,” 122.

¹⁰⁶ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 70.

¹⁰⁷ Cline, “The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines,” 123–125.

¹⁰⁸ Abinales and Amoroso, *State and Society in the Philippines*, 217.

¹⁰⁹ Ochiai, “The Mindanao Conflict,” 39–40.

¹¹⁰ Quimpo, “Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace,” 66–67.

¹¹¹ Morada and Collier, “The Philippines: State versus Security?” 558–559.

¹¹² Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 70–71.

¹¹³ Ibid.

¹¹⁴ Cline, “The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines,” 123–125.

¹¹⁵ Quimpo, “Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace,” 68.

linguistic lines, with the Tausug, Yakan, and Samal members remaining in the MNLF and the Maranao and Maguindanao joining the MILF.¹¹⁶

During the 1980s, the GRP and the AFP focused their attention on the communist insurgency in the Philippines, which, at the time, was seen as a greater threat to the country than the Moro insurgency.¹¹⁷ Cline asserts that “the subsequent overstretching of the army almost certainly led to a policy of conservation of forces against the Moros,” and that “this was reflected both in government policy and troop deployments.”¹¹⁸ Due to the MNLF’s weakened state, the Philippines considered the Moro problem contained for the time being.¹¹⁹ Nonetheless, the Philippines made another attempt at a peace deal in 1986 by agreeing to a ceasefire and committing to negotiation.¹²⁰ This tentative truce lasted less than a year, collapsing when President Corazon Aquino, under tremendous pressure from the military, announced a “total war” against all insurgents.¹²¹

The influence and effectiveness of the MNLF continued to wane over the next decade in the face of the GRP’s offensive and diminishing outside support. The Philippines finally managed to reach a peace agreement with the MNLF in 1996. The Philippines had passed a law in 1989 that formalized the ARMM as a legal entity,¹²² and, as part of the 1996 peace agreement, the MNLF abandoned its goal of independence in favor of autonomy.¹²³ MNLF founder Nur Misauri was elected as governor of the ARMM shortly thereafter.¹²⁴ As part of the agreement, the Philippines created a Special Zone of Peace and

¹¹⁶ Malcom Cook, *Turning Back? Philippine Security Policy Under Duterte* (Sydney: Lowy Institute, June 2016), 7.

¹¹⁷ Cline, “The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines,” 129.

¹¹⁸ Ibid.

¹¹⁹ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 8.

¹²⁰ Morada and Collier, “The Philippines: State versus Security?” 562–565.

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² Sukanya Podder, “Legitimacy, Loyalty and Civilian Support for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front: Changing Dynamics in Mindanao, Philippines,” *Politics, Religion and Ideology* 13, no. 4 (December 1, 2012), 501.

¹²³ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 72.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

Development (SZOPAD) in the Southern Philippines, pledging millions of dollars for the development of the Moro region.¹²⁵

Two notable things followed the peace agreement. First, and most significant, Pobre and Quilop observe that “with the signing of the agreement, the MNLF ceased to be a secessionist rebel group and has since been a part of the mainstream body politic.”¹²⁶ Second, the Philippines began integrating MNLF members, placing over 5,000 of them into the AFP and an additional 1,500 into the PNP.¹²⁷ Although achieving peace with the MNLF was a major accomplishment in the counterinsurgency effort,¹²⁸ it failed to bring peace to Mindanao, and the signing of the peace agreement with the MNLF elevated the MILF as the face of the Moro insurgency.

3. Conflict with the MILF

The MILF broke with the MNLF in 1977, but at that time its founder, Salamat Hashim, called it the New MNLF Leadership.¹²⁹ In 1984, the MILF became a completely separate organization. Hashim changed the name to the Moro Islamic Liberation Front to emphasize “‘Islamic’ in its name as its ideology and orientation (more precisely radical Islamic revivalist) [and] to distinguish itself from the secular-nationalist MNLF.”¹³⁰ In addition to distinguishing itself from the mostly secular MNLF by stressing its Islamic character, the MILF stressed another distinction of its organization. Whereas the MNLF showed itself willing to accept territorial autonomy, the MILF initially drew a firm line on the territorial issue, stating that nothing short of an independent Muslim state would be

¹²⁵ Ralf Emmers, “Comprehensive Security and Resilience in Southeast Asia: ASEAN’s Approach to Terrorism,” *The Pacific Review* 22, no. 2 (May 2009), 166.

¹²⁶ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 10.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 9.

¹²⁸ It must be noted that armed clashes with elements of the MNLF have occurred since the peace agreement, including a significant engagement between a MNLF faction and the AFP in Zamboanga City in 2013. Bryony Lau, “The Southern Philippines in 2013: One Step Forward, One Step Back,” *Southeast Asian Affairs* 2014, no. 1 (2014), 267–269.

¹²⁹ Soliman Santos, “Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front,” *The Philippine Human Development Report* (2005), 4–5.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

acceptable.¹³¹ From the time of its inception until its breakout in 1996, the MILF largely remained off the GRP's radar, as the government focused on achieving peace with the MNLF. However, during this time, the MILF steadily increased its armed capability, even as the MNLF went through a decline.¹³²

The 1996 peace agreement between the MNLF and the GRP launched the MILF into position as the main Moro insurgent group and the largest armed entity in the region.¹³³ Although the MILF had engaged in violent activity prior to 1996, its rapid rise following the peace agreement caught the GRP off guard.¹³⁴ The MILF rejected the peace agreement on the grounds that it only provided autonomy instead of independence¹³⁵ and that it failed to actually benefit the Muslims.¹³⁶ About 5,000 MNLF troops, also displeased with the peace agreement, defected to the MILF, nearly doubling MILF's size.¹³⁷

By 2000, the MILF's armed forces¹³⁸ resembled a conventional military. Estimates place the size of the MILF around 15,000 fighters,¹³⁹ and these fighters wore uniforms and operated out of fixed-site camps.¹⁴⁰ Additionally, at least 10,000 irregular fighters were available if needed.¹⁴¹ The MILF also operated as a conventional military during this period, although Abinales notes that most of the battles fought by the MILF up until this

¹³¹ Cline, "The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines," 125.

¹³² Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 7.

¹³³ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 73.

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Cline, "The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines," 130.

¹³⁶ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 10.

¹³⁷ Zachary Abuza, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 28, no. 6 (2005), 462.

¹³⁸ The armed element of the MILF is called the Bangsamoro Islamic Armed Forces (BIAF); however, the BIAF is very much intertwined with the MILF. Therefore, for purposes of clarity, this thesis will use the name of the parent organization, the MILF, when referring to both the MILF leadership and its armed forces.

¹³⁹ There are numerous and widely varied estimates of the MILF's size. However, the majority of estimates fall in the 12,000-15,000 range. The AFP placed the size of the MILF at 15,960 (Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 24), and Abuza estimates 15,000 (Abuza, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," 463).

¹⁴⁰ Abuza, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," 462.

¹⁴¹ Ibid., 463.

point had been “petty skirmishes.”¹⁴² Nonetheless, by 2000, the MILF, headquartered in Camp Abu Bakar in the area bordering Maguindanao and Lanao del Sur, “controlled enormous swaths of territory in central Mindanao and began to establish a proto-state governed by the *sharia*.”¹⁴³ In the areas it controlled, the MILF established a court system that adjudicated both civil and criminal issues.¹⁴⁴ The MILF also collected taxes and performed police functions,¹⁴⁵ attempting to garner legitimacy and fill in the void caused by a weak state presence.

The MILF had become so powerful that the GRP decided to take drastic action, and in 2000, President Joseph Estrada announced an “all-out war” against the MILF.¹⁴⁶ From February through July of 2000, the AFP launched a series of operations in Mindanao,¹⁴⁷ in what was probably the most significant military action in the campaign against the MILF. The operations were successful from a tactical standpoint. Since the MILF had fixed-site camps, the AFP—with air and naval support, artillery, and armor—overmatched the MILF in firepower and seized all of its objectives,¹⁴⁸ including Camp Abu Baker, “the MILF symbol of defiance against the government.”¹⁴⁹ While Estrada’s 2000 war only resulted in an estimated 3% reduction of the total MILF strength,¹⁵⁰ Abinales calls the outcome “devastating for the MILF,” as all of its main camps were lost to GRP forces.¹⁵¹

The aftermath of the AFP operations in 2000 revealed three notable effects. First, the MILF changed its tactics, shifting from a conventional-type military force to a guerilla force. No longer did the MILF use fixed sites, but it began to operate out of hidden, mobile

¹⁴² Patricio N. Abinales, “The End of War in the Southern Philippines,” *Asian Ethnicity* 15, no. 3 (2014), 395.

¹⁴³ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 74.

¹⁴⁴ Thomas M. McKenna, *Muslim Rulers and Rebels: Everyday Politics and Armed Separatism in the Southern Philippines* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 213.

¹⁴⁵ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 11.

¹⁴⁶ Abinales, “The End of War in the Southern Philippines,” 395.

¹⁴⁷ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 49–103.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, xxvii.

¹⁵⁰ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 128.

¹⁵¹ Abinales, “The End of War in the Southern Philippines,” 395.

camps that were much more difficult to target.¹⁵² Also, the MILF's territorial control became much more fluid,¹⁵³ and it found itself confined to a smaller and more constricted area.¹⁵⁴ Second, the MILF, upset by the force used against it and especially angry about the loss of Camp Abu Bakar, pulled out of preliminary peace talks that had been going on for several years.¹⁵⁵ Third, armed clashes between the MILF and the GRP significantly declined.¹⁵⁶

In 2001, Estrada's successor, President Macapagal Arroyo, brought the MILF back to the negotiating table by declaring an "all-out peace" policy and instituting a unilateral cease-fire.¹⁵⁷ These negotiations resulted in a new Tripoli Agreement in June of 2000, a joint statement in which both sides gave concessions.¹⁵⁸ The MILF showed willingness to consider autonomy rather than independence, and the GRP showed it was willing to drop arrest warrants for MILF leaders.¹⁵⁹

After the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks, the U.S. set up the Joint Special Operations Task Force-Philippines (JSOTF-P) to operate in Mindanao and Sulu as part of its Global War on Terror.¹⁶⁰ This task force had the mission of training, advising, and supporting Philippine security forces in counterterrorist operations.¹⁶¹ Although JSOTF-P's primary target was the Al Qaeda-linked Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG), evidence of the MILF providing training and limited sanctuary to ASG and the terrorist organization Jemaah Islamiyah (JI) brought the MILF unwanted attention from the American-advised AFP.¹⁶² Concerned that it would be placed on the list of terrorist organizations and bring

¹⁵² Santos, "Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front," 17.

¹⁵³ Podder, "Legitimacy, Loyalty and Civilian Support for the Moro Islamic Liberation Front," 502.

¹⁵⁴ Abinales, "The End of War in the Southern Philippines," 395.

¹⁵⁵ Santos, "Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front," 17–18.

¹⁵⁶ Abinales, "The End of War in the Southern Philippines," 395.

¹⁵⁷ Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," 69.

¹⁵⁸ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 79–80.

¹⁵⁹ Ibid.

¹⁶⁰ Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," 69–70.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," 69–70.

unwanted international support for the GRP, the MILF formally cut ties with JI¹⁶³ and publicly renounced terrorism in 2003.¹⁶⁴

From 2003 to 2008, fighting between the MILF and the GRP stayed at a relatively low level as peace talks and a shaky cease-fire continued. A breakthrough in peace negotiations finally occurred in 2008 when the MILF and GRP reached a peace deal that created an expanded autonomous government for the Moros and addressed several other MILF concerns.¹⁶⁵ However, the Supreme Court blocked the GRP from signing the document on constitutional grounds,¹⁶⁶ and MILF-GRP fighting resumed.¹⁶⁷

Clashes between the MILF and GRP began to ebb in 2010, and when President Benigno Aquino took office, a much-weakened MILF resumed peace talks.¹⁶⁸ Steady progress was made in the peace process, with the two sides agreeing upon a peace deal framework in 2012, and finally reaching a comprehensive agreement in 2014.¹⁶⁹ Thus, far, domestic political factors have prevented the Philippine legislature from enacting the agreement into law, and the future of this peace agreement is uncertain.¹⁷⁰ However, violence between the MILF and the GRP has been reduced to nearly zero in recent years, even though the MILF remains an armed organization.

¹⁶³ Abuza, "The Moro Islamic Liberation Front at 20: State of the Revolution," 467.

¹⁶⁴ Bong Fabe and Mayen Jaymalin, "MILF Chief Renounces Terror," *The Philippine Star*, June 23, 2003, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/211163/milf-chief-renounces-terror>.

¹⁶⁵ Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict," 40.

¹⁶⁶ The constitutional issues were of process, not of the substance of the agreement. GMA News reported that the court ruled the agreement unconstitutional "because its proponents had agreed to sign it even if it had failed to consult with all the stake-holders, including the communities that would have been affected by the formation of the [Bangasmoro Judicial Entity]." GMA News, "It's Final: MOA-AD Unconstitutional, Says SC," November 21, 2008, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/134927/it-s-final-moa-ad-unconstitutional-says-sc/story/>.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹⁶⁸ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 86.

¹⁶⁹ Ibid., 87–92.

¹⁷⁰ Ibid., 96–105.

4. Abu Sayyaf and Global Jihadist Groups

With the MILF and MNLF contained and shifting from violence to political action, smaller groups that pose unique challenges have carried on the Moro insurgency. Although in some cases these groups have been classified as terrorist groups or criminal gangs, they have stated objectives that involve delegitimizing and ending the authority of the Philippine government in the Muslim areas of the Southern Philippines. Although these groups use criminal activities for funding and use terrorism to achieve their goals, they meet the definition of insurgent groups as defined in Chapter II. Groups falling into this category include the ASG, the Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters (BIFF), and the Maute Group.

The ASG, founded in 1991 by the Islamist radical Abdurajak Janjalani, splintered from the MNLF after Janjalani became disenchanted with the MNLF leadership.¹⁷¹ Janjalani wrote that the ASG's objectives were to establish an Islamic state and advocated war as a means to that end.¹⁷² The ASG distinguished itself from the other insurgent groups in several ways. In its early years, the ASG received a significant amount of its funding from Al Qaeda,¹⁷³ and, unlike the MNLF and MILF, received little popular support.¹⁷⁴ The ASG also employed unique tactics, using speedboats to leverage the maritime mobility offered by the Mindanao coastline and the Sulu Archipelago.¹⁷⁵ Lastly, the ASG did not shy away from targeting civilians.¹⁷⁶

¹⁷¹ Santos, "Evolution of the Armed Conflict on the Moro Front," 14.

¹⁷² Rommel C. Banlaoi, "The Abu Sayyaf Group: From Mere Banditry to Genuine Terrorism," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2006): 250.

¹⁷³ Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," 69.

¹⁷⁴ Fowler, "Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now" 8.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid.

¹⁷⁶ Rogers, "Beyond the Abu Sayyaf," 16–18.

Since the early 2000s, the roughly 400-man strong¹⁷⁷ ASG has been the primary target of the military portion of the GRP's counterinsurgency efforts.¹⁷⁸ The GRP has had success in killing or arresting a number of the ASG leaders, resulting in the group becoming fragmented in recent years.¹⁷⁹ However, the ASG remains a major threat. In addition to the ASG's penchant for terrorist attacks, in 2016 a faction of the ASG, called the Isnilon Hapilon faction, pledged allegiance to the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS), keeping the group at the top of the list of the GRP's concerns in Mindanao.¹⁸⁰

The BIFF emerged in 2010, splintering from the MILF as a result of disapproval of the MILF's peace dealings with the GRP.¹⁸¹ While clashes between the MILF and GRP were tapering off, the AFP had to put resources toward combating the BIFF. Chalk writes that the BIFF showed itself "willing and capable of engaging Philippine security forces, targeting both military and police outposts" with the stated objective of those attacks being "to sabotage the peace process between the government and the MILF as part of the long-term goal of achieving Bangsamoro independence."¹⁸² In 2014, the BIFF joined the ASG in pledging allegiance to ISIS,¹⁸³ in another case of a Philippine insurgent group aligning itself with the greater *jihad* movement.

The Maute Group bears mentioning as the organization that has made the most significant impact on the security situation in Mindanao in recent years. The Maute Group, ISIS-linked and founded by the radical brothers Omar and Abdullah Maute in 2012, was

¹⁷⁷ Franco gives the estimation for the current size of the ASG as about 400 members. Joseph Franco, "Uncertainty in Duterte's Muslim Mindanao," *Southeast Asian Affairs* (2017): 298.

The estimated strength of the ASG in 2000–2002 was around 1,000. Bob East, *Terror Truncated: The Decline of the Abu Sayyaf Group from the Crucial Year 2002* (Newcastle, UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 2.

¹⁷⁸ Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," 70.

¹⁷⁹ Franco, "Uncertainty in Duterte's Muslim Mindanao," 299.

¹⁸⁰ Ibid.

¹⁸¹ Abinales, "The End of War in the Southern Philippines," 396.

¹⁸² Peter Chalk, "The Bangsamoro Islamic Freedom Fighters: The Newest Obstacles to Peace in the Southern Philippines?" *CTC Sentinel* 6 (November 2013), 16–17.

¹⁸³ Ricardo Saludo, "How grave is the ISIS threat to the Philippines?" *Manila Times*, October 8, 2014, <http://www.manilatimes.net/grave-isis-threat-philippines/132938/>.

virtually unknown until it began conducting high profile attacks in 2016.¹⁸⁴ In June of 2016, after a series of operations against the Maute Group, the AFP captured the Maute Group's stronghold and declared the group defeated.¹⁸⁵ This assessment turned out to be very wrong, and in November 2016, the Maute Group occupied the town of Butig in Lanao del Sur, sparking a major clash with the AFP and displacing about 90 percent of the local population.¹⁸⁶ In May of 2017, a group of about 700 rebels, led by the Maute Group, occupied Marawi City, which had a population of 200,000.¹⁸⁷ Marawi turned into the center of a major battle that persisted for months. When the five-month long siege ended in October, the fighting had claimed the lives of over 900 rebels and 165 Philippine security force members.¹⁸⁸

The Marawi battle poses two concerns for the GRP's counterinsurgency efforts. First, by being able to control a city as large as Marawi, the Maute Group has gained a tremendous amount of publicity, which aids the recruiting efforts of the various insurgent groups, and challenges the idea that the GRP is capable of providing adequate security in Mindanao. Second, the ASG and the BIFF supported the Maute Group in the Marawi occupation,¹⁸⁹ demonstrating that the ISIS-affiliated groups can and will cooperate with each other and signifying the potential for a larger and more organized Islamist insurgency.

Other insurgent groups in the Southern Philippines have aligned themselves with ISIS since 2014, such as Ansar Khilafah.¹⁹⁰ These groups have established training camps

¹⁸⁴ Jonathan Head, "Maute Rebel Group: A Rising Threat to Philippines," May 31, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40103602>.

¹⁸⁵ Franco, "Uncertainty in Duterte's Muslim Mindanao," 298.

¹⁸⁶ Ibid.

¹⁸⁷ *Oxford Analytica Daily Brief Service*, "Philippines: More Martial Law is Duterte Win, for Now," Jul 25, 2017, <https://dailybrief.oxan.com/Analysis/DB222391/More-Philippines-martial-law-is-Dutertes-win-for-now>.

¹⁸⁸ Maxine Betteridge-Moes, "What Happened in Marawi?" October 29, 2017, <http://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/2017/10/happened-marawi-171029085314348.html>.

¹⁸⁹ "Philippines: More Martial Law is Duterte Win, for Now."

¹⁹⁰ Caleb Weiss, "The Islamic State Grows in the Philippines," *FDD's Long War Journal* (2016), <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2016/06/islamic-state-officially-creates-province-in-the-philippines.php>.

in Mindanao¹⁹¹ and have raised concerns within the GRP of a potential new threat coming from ISIS-affiliated foreign fighters entering the region, as is the pattern with ISIS-linked groups in other countries.¹⁹² At the beginning of the Marawi siege, President Rodrigo Duterte declared martial law for the entire island of Mindanao in order to combat what was feared to be a growing insurgency.¹⁹³

In dealing with organizations such as the ASG and the Maute Group, the GRP's efforts have been mostly of a military nature, with Franco noting that "combat operations take precedence over negotiations."¹⁹⁴ In parallel with its military counterinsurgency operations, the GRP has put resources into the economic development of Mindanao, in an attempt to increase support from the Muslim population.¹⁹⁵ Actions in areas of both security and development have been managed by the central government. Although the GRP has largely followed the counterinsurgency principles outlined in Chapter 1, it has focused its efforts at the national level, with little effort put into localization.

B. ANALYSIS OF THE PHILIPPINES' COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

Overall, the GRP has not yet achieved counterinsurgency success, as evidenced by the fact that insurgency remains in Mindanao. However, this does not suggest that the GRP has failed to make notable achievements. The GRP has effectively eliminated the two largest insurgent groups in the MNLF and MILF. This section analyzes the GRP's counterinsurgency campaign, identifying shortfalls as well as areas in which its efforts have produced good results.

¹⁹¹ Weiss, "The Islamic State Grows in the Philippines."

¹⁹² Jake Watts, "Philippines Says Foreign Fighters Have Joined Militant Group," *Wall Street Journal*, May 26, 2017, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/philippines-says-foreign-fighters-have-joined-militant-group-1495779609>.

¹⁹³ BBC, "Philippines Duterte: Martial Law Extended in Mindanao," July 22, 2017, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40690589>.

¹⁹⁴ Franco, "Uncertainty in Duterte's Muslim Mindanao," 300.

¹⁹⁵ Fowler, "Philippine Counterinsurgency Strategy: Then and Now" 10.

1. Military Effectiveness

Because the GRP has used the military as “the chief instrument of counterinsurgency,”¹⁹⁶ the AFP’s performance in this role bears special scrutiny in the evaluation of the overall counterinsurgency strategy. The AFP has received criticism of its counterinsurgency effectiveness throughout the years. For example, Cline, writing in 2000, stated, “Although some government offensives and sweeps were conducted, reporting from the period suggests that most clashes were initiated by the guerrillas, with government forces typically being in reactive mode. There is little evidence of any particular counterinsurgent tactical proficiency among the Philippine military.”¹⁹⁷ Although statements such as these are accurate at face value, they should be examined in the context of objectives and results. In this context, two points counter criticism of the AFP. First, if complete destruction of the insurgent groups were the objective, then the AFP’s campaigns against the MNLF and MILF could be considered abysmal failures; however, the AFP’s Office of Strategic and Special Studies clearly asserts that “total annihilation of the MILF was not a policy goal.”¹⁹⁸ Second, when the AFP did take offensive initiative, such as during the multiple declarations of “all-out war” and particularly during the 2000 offensive, it had resounding tactical success.

The AFP’s overarching objective in fighting the MNLF and the MILF was to contain those groups and weaken them to the point that they were willing to negotiate a peace agreement.¹⁹⁹ In this context, the AFP accomplished its objective. The AFP managed to weaken both the MNLF and the MILF to the point that those groups were willing to concede the issue of independence in pursuit of a peace agreement. Ultimately, the AFP reduced an insurgency that began as a conventional military force to a force relying upon

¹⁹⁶ Johnathan T. Chow, “ASEAN Counterterrorism Cooperation since 9/11,” *Asian Survey* 45, no. 2 (2005): 307.

¹⁹⁷ Cline, “The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines,” 129.

¹⁹⁸ Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 119.

¹⁹⁹ The AFP’s 2010 *Internal Peace and Security Plan “Bayanihan,”* lays out strategic objectives. While the objective for groups such as the ASG is defeat, the strategic objective for the MILF is “contribute to the resolution of conflict.” Armed Forces of the Philippines, *Internal Peace and Security Plan “Bayanihan,”* 22, [www.army.mil.ph/atr-website/pdf_files/IPSP/IPSP Bayanihan.pdf](http://www.army.mil.ph/atr-website/pdf_files/IPSP/IPSP%20Bayanihan.pdf).

decentralized guerilla tactics and then further reduced it to small groups reliant on terror tactics.

Another area that should be evaluated is whether the GRP adequately resourced the AFP for its counterinsurgency campaign. Assessing resources is somewhat difficult because the level of resources applied to the Mindanao counterinsurgency waxed and waned through the 50-year conflict. For good portions of the conflict, most of the GRP's military resources were applied to fighting communist insurgents, as noted above. At other times, the GRP deployed more than half of the entire military to Mindanao to combat the Moro insurgency, with Abuza stating that at one point the insurgency in Mindanao tied down 70–80 percent of the armed forces.²⁰⁰ Aside from troop levels, several sources highlight equipment shortfalls for the AFP. De Castro points to a 2007 capability assessment conducted by the AFP, noting that “the report stated that the poor condition of the equipment severely affected the military’s effectiveness and efficiency in counterinsurgency operations.”²⁰¹ Pobre and Quilop echo this assessment, stating that “on account of budgetary constraints, the AFP did not have enough of modern and more combat-effective equipment and weapons, such as [night vision goggles], precision-guided weapons, modern, artillery, and modern small arms.”²⁰²

While it seems clear that the counterinsurgency effort in Mindanao was at times undermanned due to the priority given to the anti-communist campaign, and while equipment shortfalls undoubtedly added to the tactical challenge faced by the AFP, these things can hardly be pinpointed as the factors leading to an ongoing insurgency today. It can be argued that resource shortfalls protracted armed conflict with the MNLF and MILF, but resource shortfalls for the AFP do not play a significant role in the current counterinsurgency operations against groups such as the ASG and Maute Group. According to Franco, the AFP currently has deployed to Mindanao “four [Philippine Army (PA)] Infantry Divisions, most of the assets of the PA’s lone Mechanized Infantry Division,

²⁰⁰ Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 70.

²⁰¹ Renato Cruz De Castro, “Philippine Strategic Culture: Continuity in the Face of Changing Regional Dynamics,” *Contemporary Security Policy* (2014): 258.

²⁰² Pobre and Quilop, *In Assertion of Sovereignty Volume One*, 123.

and several Philippine Marine Corps' (PMC) Battalion Landing Teams. In addition to these conventional forces are contingents from the PA Special Operations Command (SOCOM) and their counterparts from the Navy and Air Force.”²⁰³ This amounts to nearly 40 percent of the AFP's ground combat power, and considering that the MILF is not in an active state of armed conflict, it is difficult to argue that the GRP is not providing an adequate number of troops to Mindanao. Likewise, the military aid that the United States provided to the AFP post-9/11 has gone a long way in modernizing the AFP's equipment. Despite President Duterte's seemingly cooler attitude toward the United States, U.S. support has continued into 2017, with the United States providing the AFP with a host of equipment ranging from sniper rifles to unmanned aerial systems.²⁰⁴ Although the AFP's equipment may still have room for improvement, the AFP is far better armed than any insurgent group in the Mindanao region, and resource shortfalls do not explain the failure to end the insurgency.

2. Failed Peace Processes

The political aspect should be examined as a possible hindrance to counterinsurgency success. The GRP achieved a peace agreement with the MNLF, but, despite reaching a landmark deal with the MILF in 2014, the GRP has thus far failed to make this agreement binding by enacting it into law. President Duterte came to office in 2016, raising optimism that prospects of a lasting peace agreement with the MILF would be revived. Although Duterte has revived efforts to work toward “forging a final solution on Bangsamoro,”²⁰⁵ it is unclear whether the legislature is any more likely now to approve such an agreement than it was several years ago. The question is if the GRP's ability to work out a peace agreement should be used as a measure of counterinsurgency success. Peace agreements were instrumental in ending or reducing conflict with the MNLF and

²⁰³ Franco, “Uncertainty in Duterte's Muslim Mindanao,” 298.

²⁰⁴ Prashanth Parameswaran, “US Terror Aid to Philippines Signals Enduring Defense Ties Under Duterte,” *The Diplomat*, June 8, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/us-terror-aid-to-philippines-signals-enduring-defense-ties-under-duterte/>.

²⁰⁵ Ochiai, “The Mindanao Conflict,” 41.

MILF, but this thesis questions whether peace agreements are an effective measure of success in regards to the current counterinsurgency effort.

If the GRP were to successfully pass and implement the MILF peace agreement or a modified version of it, very little would change with regard to the GRP's counterinsurgency efforts. The AFP-MILF cease-fire has created a de facto peace scenario. Figure 4 shows the number of armed encounters between the GRP and MILF by year, with only one armed encounter occurring between 2012 and 2015. Also, the MILF has formed a political party and entered politics,²⁰⁶ signifying a fundamental shift toward pursuing legitimate means to its objectives rather than armed insurgency. Quimpo assesses that "even if the [peace agreement] collapses, it is most unlikely for the MILF to return to war or shift to jihadism."²⁰⁷ Additionally, the bulk of the GRP's counterinsurgency efforts are focused on organizations such as the ASG and the Maute Group, which are the current face of the insurgency. The disconnected nature of these groups, the horizontal structure of the current insurgency, the radical ideology of these groups, and their willingness to use terrorism renders a peace deal, such as those agreed to by the MNLF and MILF, unlikely and perhaps even impossible. While a final peace agreement with the MILF is certainly worth pursuing, the success or failure of such an agreement will likely have little impact from a counterinsurgency standpoint going forward. Furthermore, the peace agreements have accommodated single groups, thus either fueling or prolonging conflict with the groups unsatisfied with those agreements. The MNLF peace deal led to the rise of the MILF and ASG, and peace talks with the MILF, despite the absence of a final agreement, contributed to the emergence of the newer, more radical insurgency.

²⁰⁶ *Asia News Monitor*, "Philippines: MILF Files Registration and Accreditation as Regional Political Party," May 11, 2015, <http://search.proquest.com/docview/1679584995/>.

²⁰⁷ Quimpo, "Mindanao: Nationalism, Jihadism and Frustrated Peace," 83.

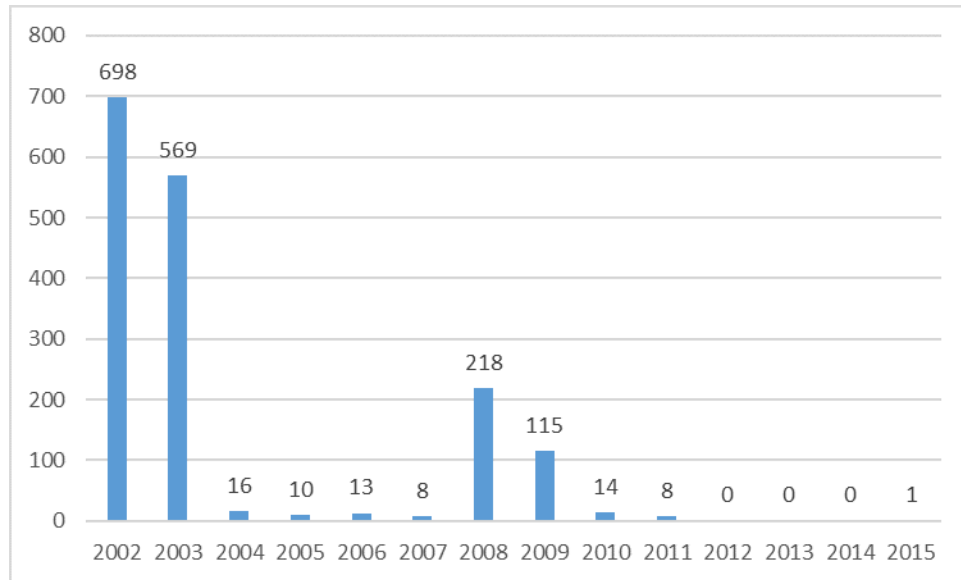


Figure 4. Armed encounters between the MILF and GRP by year.²⁰⁸

3. Effectiveness of Population Engagement/Development Projects

The GRP has recognized that ending the Moro insurgency would require increasing the Moro peoples' perceptions of its legitimacy and addressing the causes of popular discontent with the government. Although military action has made up most of the GRP's counterinsurgency strategy, the GRP has made efforts at developing the Mindanao region since the early days of the counterinsurgency in order to eliminate what it sees as root causes of insurgency. In the 1970s, the Marcos administration implemented developmental programs targeting the Muslim areas, focusing mostly on infrastructure, health, and education.²⁰⁹ In 1997, President Ramos implemented measures to attract foreign investment into the ARMM and spent "\$1.6 billion for Mindanao to develop infrastructure, power, housing, irrigation, and livelihood projects in the region."²¹⁰ President Arroyo continued to make development a priority of the GRP's Mindanao peace efforts, implementing policies in 2001 toward that end.²¹¹

²⁰⁸ Source: Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 83.

²⁰⁹ Cline, "The Islamic insurgency in the Philippines," 128.

²¹⁰ Morada and Collier, "The Philippines: State versus Society?" 571.

²¹¹ Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict," 41.

The GRP, under the Benigno Aquino administration, greatly stepped up its efforts to take a more holistic counterinsurgency approach in what can be considered a shift in the GRP's counterinsurgency strategy toward a more population-centric approach. In 2010, the AFP released a new Internal Peace and Security Plan, which closely paralleled the counterinsurgency principles outlined in Chapter I. This plan stated the AFP's primary focus as "*Winning the Peace* and not just defeating the enemy"²¹² and outlined an approach that "puts people's welfare at the center of its operations."²¹³ Also, the plan framed security in a "whole of nation approach," recognizing the need for cooperative and unified efforts between the AFP, other governmental and non-governmental agencies, and local communities, stating that "the AFP cannot single-handedly solve the internal peace and security concerns of the country."²¹⁴ As part of the whole of nation approach, the GRP continued to increase efforts at development. The 2012 peace agreement framework between the GRP and MILF contained mechanisms for socioeconomic development in the Muslim areas of Mindanao.²¹⁵ Foreign aid also comprised a significant portion of Mindanao development funds. Japan led in foreign contributions, spending 19 billion yen in Mindanao investments from 2006–2015.²¹⁶ Currently, development efforts continue. The Philippines' 2017 budget increases funding for economic growth in the ARMM by 13.2 percent and increases funding for the Mindanao Development Authority by 45% over 2016 levels.²¹⁷

The above numbers might seem to suggest a great deal of progress in developing Mindanao, but economic development takes a long period of time, and thus far the success of the GRP's efforts in this area remain to be seen. The poorest province in the Philippines

²¹² Armed Forces of the Philippines, *Internal Peace and Security Plan "Bayanihan,"* vi.

²¹³ *Ibid.*, 25.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Ochiai, "The Mindanao Conflict," 41.

²¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 47.

²¹⁷ Pia Ranada, "A Look at the 2017 Budget: Will It Help Duterte Fulfill His Promises?" January 21, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/move-ph/issues/disasters/175374-philippines-disaster-risk-reduction-management-fund-2017-ndrrmc>.

is found in the ARMM, and four of the ten poorest provinces fall in Mindanao.²¹⁸ In 2015, the ARMM had the highest poverty level of any region in the Philippines by a significant margin.²¹⁹ In education, the ARMM has the highest level of children and youth out of school of any region.²²⁰ A good portion of the problem undoubtedly stems from the corruption so pervasive in Mindanao,²²¹ but the problem is also probably part of a vicious cycle whereby the security situation hinders investment, and thus economic development, and the lack of economic development degrades the security situation. Abuza asserts that “regions that are affected by protracted conflicts tend to lag in almost every measure of human development,”²²² and it would be unfair to lay all the blame for the Southern Philippines’ lagging development on the GRP.

Although the effectiveness of winning the hearts and minds of the people can be difficult to measure, the results of several surveys indicate that the GRP may be achieving some success in this area. A 2014 survey by The Asia Foundation shows that more people in the ARMM approve of the GRP-MILF peace agreement framework than disapprove by a more than two-to-one margin.²²³ Also, recent polling shows that people in Mindanao

²¹⁸ The ten poorest provinces in the Philippines in 2016 are identified in Louise Maureen Simeon, “DA to Focus on 10 Poorest Provinces,” *The Philippine Star*, June, 27, 2016, <http://www.philstar.com/headlines/2016/06/27/1597101/da-focus-10-poorest-provinces>.

²¹⁹ Philippine Statistics Authority, “2015 Full Year Poverty Statistics,” accessed May 7, 2018, <http://psa.gov.ph/poverty-press-releases/data>.

²²⁰ Philippine Statistics Authority, “Out-of-School Children and Youth in the Philippines (Results from the 2013 Functional Literacy, Education and Mass Media Survey),” April 20, 2015, <https://psa.gov.ph/content/out-school-children-and-youth-philippines-results-2013-functional-literacy-education-and>.

²²¹ Quimpo describes the corruption problem in the ARMM in Nathan Gilbert Quimpo, “Mindanao, Southern Philippines: The Pitfalls of Working for Peace in a Time of Political Decay,” in *Autonomy and Ethnic Conflict in South and Southeast Asia*, ed. Rajat Ganguly (New York: Routledge, 2012), 125.

Rogers also states that “Mindanao’s enduring poverty is an effective incubator for violence. Neither military nor development aid will succeed, though, until the problems of collusion and corruption are decisively addressed.” Rogers, “Beyond the Abu Sayyaf,” 19–20.

²²² Abuza, *Forging Peace in Southeast Asia*, 178.

²²³ Steven Rood, “Polling Shows Encouraging Climate of Opinion for Mindanao Peace Negotiations,” October 8, 2014, <https://asiafoundation.org/2014/10/08/polling-shows-encouraging-climate-of-opinion-for-mindanao-peace-negotiations/>.

have higher levels of approval and trust of top GRP officials than the national average,²²⁴ although a large part of this favorability is probably due to President Duterte being the first president from Mindanao and someone who claims Moro ancestry. On the other hand, the rise of ISIS-linked groups and global jihadist ideology in Mindanao²²⁵ creates a new dynamic and poses new challenges for the GRP. Although the ISIS-linked insurgent groups do not enjoy the level of popular support that the MNLF and MILF did, they are still able to find recruiting success. In December 2017, President Duterte asked congress to extend martial law in Mindanao for another year, and in justifying the request, he specifically cited recruiting efforts by the ASG and Maute Group.²²⁶ A measure as drastic as martial law suggests that, despite the GRP's success in building legitimacy in Mindanao, insurgent groups still have a target base from which to draw members.

4. Counterinsurgency Localization

Thus, far, the GRP has kept its counterinsurgency endeavors in Mindanao largely centralized under the AFP with little effort put toward meaningful localization. The AFP has expressed intent to use localization in its 2010 Internal Peace and Security Plan and in its 2017 AFP Development Support and Security Plan, stating in the 2017 plan that local governments are the “most critical actors in the development and security of the communities”²²⁷ and that “AFP units must... closely work and collaborate with concerned [local government units].”²²⁸ However, even though the plan continues a people-centered security approach, the actual strategy portion of the plan holds responsibility for virtually

²²⁴ Pulse Asia Research, “September 2017 Nationwide Survey on the Performance and Trust Ratings of the Top Philippine Government Officials,” <http://www.pulseasia.ph/september-2017-nationwide-survey-on-the-performance-and-trust-ratings-of-the-top-philippine-government-officials/>.

²²⁵ The GRP claims that there are at least 20 ISIS-linked groups operating in Mindanao. Tetch Torres-Tupas, “20 IS-linked terrorist groups operating in Mindanao – Calida,” June 19, 2017, <http://newsinfo.inquirer.net/906858/20-is-linked-terrorist-groups-operating-in-mindanao-calida>.

²²⁶ Trisha Macas, “Duterte Cites ISIS, Communist Threats in Seeking 1-yr Extension of Mindanao Martial Law,” December 11, 2017, <http://www.gmanetwork.com/news/news/nation/636089/duterte-cites-isis-communist-threats-in-seeking-1-yr-extension-of-mindanao-martial-law/story/>.

²²⁷ Armed Forces of the Philippines, *AFP Development Support and Security Plan “Kapayapaan”: 2017–2022*, 21, <http://www.afp.mil.ph/images/AFP-Development-Support-and--Security-Plan-Kapayapaan-2017-2022.pdf>.

²²⁸ *Ibid.*, 27.

all counterinsurgency functions at the AFP level, with the only portions remotely related to localization being guidance for the AFP to “coordinate” activities at the local level. The GRP has taken other minor steps toward localization, including the integration of MNLF members into the AFP and plans to stand up Muslim units to operate in Muslim areas of the country,²²⁹ but these measures fall far short of actually pushing counterinsurgency functions down to the local level.

C. CONCLUSION

Analysis of the GRP’s counterinsurgency strategy and performance reveals both successes and shortcomings. Although the AFP has had various shortfalls in manning and equipment, it has achieved overall tactical success and met strategic objectives in spite of those shortcomings. The political environment in the Philippines has thus far prevented a peace agreement from being enacted into law. However, the GRP and MILF are currently in a de facto peace, and the failure to achieve a peace agreement has had little effect either positive or negative on the overall counterinsurgency operations.

Although the GRP has made efforts to take a “whole of nation” approach to security and has put a notable amount of resources into the development of Mindanao, the results of these development measures have been underwhelming. Mindanao, and the ARMM in particular, contains some of the poorest and most underdeveloped parts of the nation. Also, even though the GRP’s population-centric approach seems to be paying dividends in establishing government legitimacy, groups like ASG and other ISIS-linked groups are conducting massive recruiting efforts, indicating that the GRP faces a challenge in countering the spread of global *jihadist* ideology. Lastly, the GRP has shown very little in the way of a serious attempt at localizing the counterinsurgency, choosing rather to keep a close hold on counterinsurgency functions at the AFP level.

The insurgency in the Southern Philippines has gone through two distinct changes. First, the MNLF insurgency ended and gave way to the MILF insurgency. Next, as peace with the MILF became an achievable goal, an Islamist insurgency with links to the global

²²⁹ Armed Forces of the Philippines, “AFP to Allocate 5% for Muslims in Recruitment,” April 17, 2017, <http://www.afp.mil.ph/index.php/8-afp-news/407-afp-to-allocate-5-for-muslims-in-recruitment>.

jihad arose. Each time the GRP made peace with an insurgent group, the most radical members of that group split off and continued the insurgency. As a result, each successive phase of the insurgency has been more radical in ideology than its predecessor. The GRP's counterinsurgency efforts have proven successful in bringing the MNLF to an agreed upon peace and achieving an open-ended cease fire with the MILF with good prospects for a peace agreement. However, the newest manifestation of the insurgency, multiple groups with allegiance to ISIS, poses an entirely different problem to the GRP. It is unlikely that the same counterinsurgency strategy that worked for the MNLF and MILF will have success against small, agile organizations that rely upon terrorism as their primary tactic.

IV. CHECHNYA CASE STUDY

A. HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

Much like the Moro insurgency, the Chechen insurgency in many ways represents a repetition of previous conflicts between Chechnya and Russia. This section summarizes the historical roots of the conflict and looks at the two counterinsurgency wars waged by Russia in recent years.

1. Background of the Conflict/Roots of Insurgency

The history of Russia attempting to assert control over Chechnya and of Chechens violently resisting goes back hundreds of years, establishing a long pattern of insurgency and counterinsurgency. Beginning in the sixteenth century, Russian tsars set their sights on the territorial conquest of the North Caucasus region.²³⁰ In 1783, the Treaty of Georgievsk led Russia to consider the North Caucasus region as part of the Russian Empire, and the first Chechen insurgency began a year later in 1784.²³¹ A Chechen *imam* named Sheikh Mansur Usharma led this rebellion, fomenting a war against Russia that lasted until his capture in 1791.²³² Although Mansur's military actions "later became the stuff of legend and were cloaked in a romantic shroud,"²³³ Russia managed to put down the rebellion. However, Russia did not have full control over Chechnya, and Mansur's rebellion set a precedent of resistance.

Following Mansur's capture and subsequent death in captivity, the Chechens continued to conduct raids and ambushes against Russian forces.²³⁴ In 1816, Tsar Alexander ordered a military campaign to establish Russian control of the Caucasus.²³⁵ General Aleksei Yermolov, given the task of establishing order in Chechnya and the

²³⁰ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 52.

²³¹ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 10.

²³² Amjad Jaimoukha, *The Chechens: A Handbook* (New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 41–42.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 42.

²³⁴ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 58–60.

²³⁵ *Ibid.*

surrounding areas, began a savage campaign of forced resettlements, deforestation, and destruction, even razing entire villages in response to attacks.²³⁶ Yermolov set another precedent of brutal counterinsurgency tactics in Chechnya, with Schaefer describing Yermolov's tactics as "permanently [setting] the savage tone for all future Russian-Chechen conflicts."²³⁷

The next conflict between Russia and the Chechens lasted 30 years, beginning in 1829 and ending in 1859.²³⁸ This phase of the Chechen insurgency saw the rise of Imam Shamil, a brilliant tactician and charismatic leader, who is revered as a folk hero in Chechnya to this day.²³⁹ Under Shamil's leadership, the Chechens effectively used guerilla warfare tactics and the natural advantage provided by their region's mountainous terrain to avoid the head-to-head battles with the Russians that led to Mansur's downfall.²⁴⁰ The insurgents frustrated Russian forces for a number of years. However, following the Crimean War, Russia repurposed an additional 200,000 troops to the North Caucasus.²⁴¹ With its massive advantage in numbers and firepower, Russia once again crushed the rebellion, captured Shamil, and formally annexed Chechnya into the Russian Empire in 1859.²⁴²

In 1918, following the collapse of the Tsarist regime, Chechnya, along with the other peoples of the region, declared independence and established the North Caucasus Mountain Republic.²⁴³ In 1921, Russia incorporated Chechnya into an Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic (ASSR), and Stalin promised this ASSR a high degree of autonomy.²⁴⁴ The Mountain ASSR, as it was called, only lasted for a few years, and in 1925, Soviet

²³⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 58–60.

²³⁷ Ibid., 60.

²³⁸ Ibid., 62–69.

²³⁹ Ibid.

²⁴⁰ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 15–18.

²⁴¹ Ibid.

²⁴² Ibid.

²⁴³ Jaimoukha, *The Chechens: A Handbook*, 54.

²⁴⁴ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 95–97.

forces deployed to Chechnya to crack down on guerilla activity and Islamic practices.²⁴⁵ The next decade saw a number of relatively small Chechen uprisings and Soviet responses, and the Soviet Union combined Chechnya and Ingushetia into the Chechen-Ingush ASSR in 1936.²⁴⁶

The Soviet Union's most significant response to Chechen uprisings thus far occurred in 1944 with Operation Lentil. Europe was in the midst of World War II, and Stalin, concerned that Chechen insurgents would join Germany in fighting against the Red Army, took preemptive action.²⁴⁷ Stalin, whose solution was extreme in every way, intended to solve the Chechnya problem by completely eliminating it. Galeotti writes, "Near enough over a single fateful night...the entire Chechen population of 480,000 was deported in Operation *Lentil*. Up to 200,000 died in what the Chechens often describe as...the Exodus. Resettled and scattered across Central Asia, Siberia and Kazakhstan, the Chechens were only allowed to return to their homeland in 1956, after Stalin's death."²⁴⁸ At this point, Russia-Chechnya conflicted entered a period of relative dormancy until the 1990s.

2. The First Chechen War: 1994–1996

In 1991, taking advantage of the turmoil caused by the impending collapse of the Soviet Union, Chechnya declared itself an independent state and elected Dzhokar Dudayev as its president.²⁴⁹ Although this move by Chechnya created tensions with Russia, a preoccupied Russia avoided military conflict at first.²⁵⁰ However, the situation drastically escalated in 1994. Chechen units backed by Moscow seized several villages, and Dudayev responded by launching attacks against Russian units, causing significant Russian casualties.²⁵¹ Russian President Boris Yeltsin, facing domestic unpopularity and a poor

²⁴⁵ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 95–97.

²⁴⁶ Jaimoukha, *The Chechens: A Handbook*, 56–57.

²⁴⁷ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 101–103.

²⁴⁸ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 20.

²⁴⁹ Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*, 21–24.

²⁵⁰ Ibid.

²⁵¹ Ibid.

economy, followed the advice of his military advisors and initiated a military intervention to regain control of Chechnya.²⁵²

In December of 1994, nearly 24,000 Russian troops, supported by air and armor, entered Chechnya.²⁵³ Russia considered the Chechen capital city of Grozny to be the center of gravity and mistakenly assumed that seizing Grozny would quickly end the war.²⁵⁴ Thus, Russian forces bypassed areas defended by Chechen forces *en route* to Grozny and approached the city from multiple directions, intending to seal off and then take the city.²⁵⁵ For the Russians, this operation quickly turned into a complete debacle, as they encountered far more resistance than they expected and as their stalled armored tank columns quickly became immobile targets for well-defended Chechen positions.²⁵⁶ Oliker writes, “Within the first hours of battle, Russian units were trapped in the streets, their armored vehicles destroyed by enemy troops shooting from upper and lower stories of buildings that main tank guns could not effectively engage...Entire tank columns were effectively paralyzed by the immobilization of the lead and trail vehicles.”²⁵⁷

With the initial Russian assault on Grozny failing to seize the city, Russian forces began a more deliberate assault, slowly and cautiously working their way through the city.²⁵⁸ The Russians also increased the amount of air and artillery support, causing tremendous civilian casualties and collateral damage. After weeks of fighting, Russian forces managed to take Grozny, but in doing so “literally raze[d] Grozny into rubble to gain control of the capital.”²⁵⁹ Galeotti describes the post-battle Grozny as “a ruin, strewn with the bodies of thousands of its citizens—estimates range up to 35,000—in a bloodbath

²⁵² Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 31–32.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*, 34.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 35.

²⁵⁵ Olga Oliker, *Russia's Chechen War 1994–2000: Lessons from Urban Combat* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2001), 10–11.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13–14.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁸ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 38.

²⁵⁹ Ray Finch, “One Face of the Modern Russian Army: General Vladimir Shamanov,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011), 406.

that the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) would describe as an ‘unimaginable catastrophe.’”²⁶⁰

Following the fall of Grozny, thousands of additional Russian troops poured into Chechnya, but Chechen rebels had mostly fled into the mountain and forest areas from which they could stage effective guerilla attacks and raids.²⁶¹ Although fighting was now sporadic and less intense, the battle for Grozny had set the tone for the rest of the First Chechen War. Russian soldiers found it very difficult to distinguish between civilian non-combatants and Chechen guerilla fighters, as is characteristic of most insurgencies. However, in many ways, Russia’s wanton disregard for civilian life was used as a deliberate tactic. Finch describes the Russian mindset as follows: “If Chechen civilians did not betray their sons, fathers, and neighbors who were fighting for Chechen independence, then these same civilians were complicit and could be treated as the enemy.”²⁶² As Russian forces spread out from Grozny, they used artillery to prepare an area thoroughly before entering it, effectively “turning each village and town into a mini-Grozny.”²⁶³

During this phase of the war, Russia’s destructive methods prompted two events that would have significant ramifications later on. First, Dudayev appealed to Muslims worldwide for aid in the fight against Russia, describing the war as a *jihād*.²⁶⁴ This sparked the first wave of foreign fighters, many of whom were veterans of the Afghanistan conflict with the Soviet Union, to enter the war on behalf of Chechnya.²⁶⁵ Although the “first war in Chechnya was waged almost exclusively in the name of national independence,” with these foreign fighters came a *jihadist* ideology that saw Chechnya as “a theater of rebels

²⁶⁰ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 38.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 40.

²⁶² Ray Finch, “One Face of the Modern Russian Army: General Vladimir Shamanov,” *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies* 24, no. 3 (2011), 407.

²⁶³ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 131.

²⁶⁴ Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*, 25.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

began to adopt terrorist tactics, not hesitating to target Russian civilians. In June of 1995 operation in the broader global Islamist onslaught.”²⁶⁶

Second, Chechen, Chechen commander Shamil Basayev led a cross-border expedition into the Russian town of Budyonnovsk, where Chechen rebels seized around 1,800 hostages—150 of which were children.²⁶⁷ A botched hostage rescue attempt left Russia humiliated and 147 people dead, and when the situation ended, Basayev managed to make it back to Chechnya unharmed.²⁶⁸ A similar situation occurred in January 1996, when Chechens conducted a raid on a Russian air base in the Dagestani city of Kizlyar and subsequently seized a hospital along with about 2,000 hostages.²⁶⁹ Once again, the Russian response proved embarrassing in its ineffectiveness. This incident ended with numerous Russian and civilian casualties and with most Chechen rebels able to make it back to Chechnya uncaptured.²⁷⁰

The final major battle of the First Chechen War occurred in August 1996. Russia managed to kill Dudayev in July,²⁷¹ and by August, Aslan Maskhadov, who assumed the leadership mantle of the Chechen insurgency, ordered a daring assault on Grozny. Fifteen hundred Chechen militants infiltrated Grozny under cover of darkness, and within hours, they had seized the majority of the city, trapping thousands of Russian troops within Grozny.²⁷² The rebels’ success prompted a stream of additional militants into the city to fight the Russians and an uncoordinated, piecemeal flow of Russian units into Grozny to join the fight.²⁷³ Russia’s counter-assault garnered little success, and, in typical fashion, Russian forces resorted to air and artillery shelling of the already war-torn city, causing an

²⁶⁶ Younkyoo Kim and Stephen Blank, “Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Russia: Contending Paradigms and Current Perspectives,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 36, no. 11 (2013): 921.

²⁶⁷ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 40–41.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*, 51.

²⁷⁰ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 40–42.

²⁷¹ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 139.

²⁷² Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 44–47.

²⁷³ Ibid.

exodus of refugees.²⁷⁴ After two weeks of fighting, “an estimated 220,000 people had fled Grozny, leaving no more than 70,000 civilians in a city which before the war had been home to 400,000.”²⁷⁵

With public opinion in Russia already turning against the war, this latest military debacle pushed Russia to the point where it was ready to end the war. By the end of August, Russia and Chechnya signed the Khasav-Yurt Accord. Under the terms of this agreement, Chechnya abandoned its claim to independence but was granted an unprecedented degree of autonomy.²⁷⁶ Also, Russia agreed to a full withdrawal of troops by the end of the year.²⁷⁷ Russia conceded far more than Chechnya in this agreement, and by virtually any measure, Russia had lost the war.

The First Chechen War proved costly to both sides, but civilians and noncombatants fared the worst. Conservative estimates put the Russian dead at 7,500, along with 4,000 Chechen fighters killed and up to 35,000 civilians.²⁷⁸

3. The Second Chechen War: 1999–2009

During the roughly three-year period between the two Chechen Wars, two notable things occurred. First, Russia “failed to provide sufficient funds to rebuild the Chechen infrastructure damaged or destroyed during the First Chechen War.”²⁷⁹ Chechnya, which was one of the most economically depressed areas of Russia before the war, was now in a state of war-torn ruin. Second, a more radical form of Islam began to gain a significant foothold in Chechnya. Foreign fighters who had entered Chechnya during the first war now held influential positions, advising high-level Chechen politicians.²⁸⁰ These foreign

²⁷⁴ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 142.

²⁷⁵ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 46.

²⁷⁶ Ibid., 47–48.

²⁷⁷ Ibid.

²⁷⁸ James Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2007), 81–82.

²⁷⁹ Ariel Cohen, *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus: Performance and Consequences* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press, 2014), 34.

²⁸⁰ Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*, 66–68.

fighters gradually shifted Chechnya's political narrative from one of independence toward a narrative of Chechnya being part of the global *jihad*, even establishing Al Qaeda-linked training camps within Chechnya.²⁸¹

In 1999, Russian Prime Minister Vladimir Putin, who came to office as a strong proponent of asserting Russian control over Chechnya,²⁸² presided over the launch of the Second Chechen War. A Chechen invasion of neighboring Dagestan provided Putin with the reason he needed to deploy forces to Chechnya.²⁸³ This invasion of Dagestan, which was led by Basayev, was a direct result of Al-Qaeda's influence on Chechen decision makers and its vision to connect Afghanistan and the North Caucasus in a contiguous Islamic state.²⁸⁴ The war began in October 1999, when Russia deployed nearly 100,000 troops and security forces to Chechnya, a number over three times larger than the amount of troops with which they started the first war.²⁸⁵ From the beginning of the conflict, Putin framed it as a counterterrorist operation, portraying Russia's actions as saving the Russian people from a foreign terrorist threat.²⁸⁶

Russia's ground assault into Chechnya, like in the first war, commenced with the objective of seizing Grozny. However, in contrast to the previous war, Russian forces moved slowly and methodically, seizing key villages and terrain along the way.²⁸⁷ Russia did not forsake its previous practice of using air, rockets, and artillery for preparation of villages and urban areas prior to entering them.²⁸⁸ The pattern of disregard for collateral damage continued, with Schaefer remarking that Russia's artillery preparation "left Grozny looking like Berlin in 1945."²⁸⁹

²⁸¹ Bodansky, *Chechen Jihad*, 66–68.

²⁸² Cohen, *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus*, 40–41.

²⁸³ Ibid.

²⁸⁴ Ibid.

²⁸⁵ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 55.

²⁸⁶ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 111–112.

²⁸⁷ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 56–57.

²⁸⁸ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 188.

²⁸⁹ Ibid., 189.

Another change Russia made in its conduct of the second war was its use of Chechens to assist in the fighting. “In the first Chechen War the implicit assumption was that Chechens were all threats to be neutralized,” Galeotti writes, but this time “they eagerly recruited Chechens, including rebel defectors...realizing that such fighters were often best suited to taking the war to the rebels.”²⁹⁰ Additionally, Akhmad Kadyrov, the chief mufti of Chechnya, grew concerned over the radical *jihadist* influence over the Chechen insurgency and joined the Russians, bringing a number of militants with him.²⁹¹

Despite heavy casualties on both sides, Russia successfully achieved most of its tactical objectives. Kramer writes, “By February 2000 the Russian army had taken control of Grozny, and by mid-2000 Russian troops...had gained a firm presence through most of Chechnya and at least nominal control of all major towns.”²⁹² At this point, the heavy fighting was over, but the counterinsurgency would continue on for nearly another decade. With insurgents pressured by both Russian forces and the Chechen militias that Russia was able to coopt, no major battles occurred after 2000.²⁹³ The insurgents were left carrying out small-scale raids and terrorist attacks, including suicide bombings and two very high profile attacks outside of Chechnya on a theater in Moscow and a school in Beslan.²⁹⁴

In 2000, Russia also took a strategic step that turned into one of the most significant moves of the entire counterinsurgency campaign, implementing policies that later became known as “Chechenization.” This strategy of Chechenization went beyond merely using Chechens for tactical military and police operations; it involved gradually increasing Chechen involvement in all aspects of counterinsurgency and eventually pushing nearly all aspects of the counterinsurgency down to the local level.

²⁹⁰ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 25.

²⁹¹ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 187–188.

²⁹² Mark Kramer, “Guerilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Terrorism in the North Caucasus: The Military Dimension of the Russian-Chechen Conflict,” *Europe-Asia Studies* 57, no. 2 (March 2005): 212.

²⁹³ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 62–63.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

This process began with Putin's installation of Akhmad Kadyrov as interim president of Chechnya.²⁹⁵ Being the former chief mufti of Chechnya and someone who had urged Chechens to take up arms against Russia in the first war,²⁹⁶ Kadyrov had some measure of credibility with the Chechen populace and, with his strong opposition to the foreign-led *jihadists* that had virtually coopted the insurgency, was uniquely situated to carry out Moscow's strategic objectives at the local level.²⁹⁷ When Kadyrov was assassinated by insurgents in 2004, his son Ramzan Kadyrov took the mantle of Chechen leadership.²⁹⁸ Most importantly, and probably in good part a result of receiving huge amounts of money from Moscow, Ramzan Kadyrov picked up the Chechenization of the counterinsurgency where his father left off.²⁹⁹

Beginning in 2005, the conflict began to take a dramatic turn in favor of the counterinsurgency, as Ramzan Kadyrov's Chechen forces "started to be increasingly deployed in combat against insurgent units, gradually replacing the Russian military as the main [counterinsurgency] force."³⁰⁰ These Chechen forces were able to obtain far more intelligence on insurgents than their Russian counterparts. Whereas Chechen civilians had a strong aversion to cooperating with Russian security forces in any way, they frequently gave information to Chechen security forces.³⁰¹ Despite Kadyrov's counterinsurgency success, his rule has been highly controversial. He took a very heavy-handed and highly-authoritarian approach to security, ruling in a way that "involves disappearances, torture, and various other human rights abuses."³⁰²

²⁹⁵ Matejova "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," 11.

²⁹⁶ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 187.

²⁹⁷ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 119.

²⁹⁸ Galeotti, *Russia's Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 63–64.

²⁹⁹ Matejova "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," 11–12.

³⁰⁰ Emil A. Souleimanov and Huseyn Aliyev, "Asymmetry of Values, Indigenous Forces, and Incumbent Success in Counterinsurgency: Evidence from Chechnya," *Journal of Strategic Studies* 38, no. 5 (2015): 689.

³⁰¹ Ratelle and Souleimanov, "A Perfect Counterinsurgency?" 1299.

³⁰² Matejova "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," 14.

The overall violence in Chechnya steadily dwindled over the next several years, and in 2009 Russia declared the end of combat operations in Chechnya and withdrew most of its troops.³⁰³ The lack of a resurgent rebellion in the following years demonstrates that Russia’s declaration of victory was not premature. Souleimanov and Aliyev point out that since the official end of the Second Chechen War, “Chechnya has been among the most secure areas of the North Caucasus.”³⁰⁴ Figure 5 shows armed conflict-related violence clearly trending downward in the post-war years, with only 14 deaths in 2015.

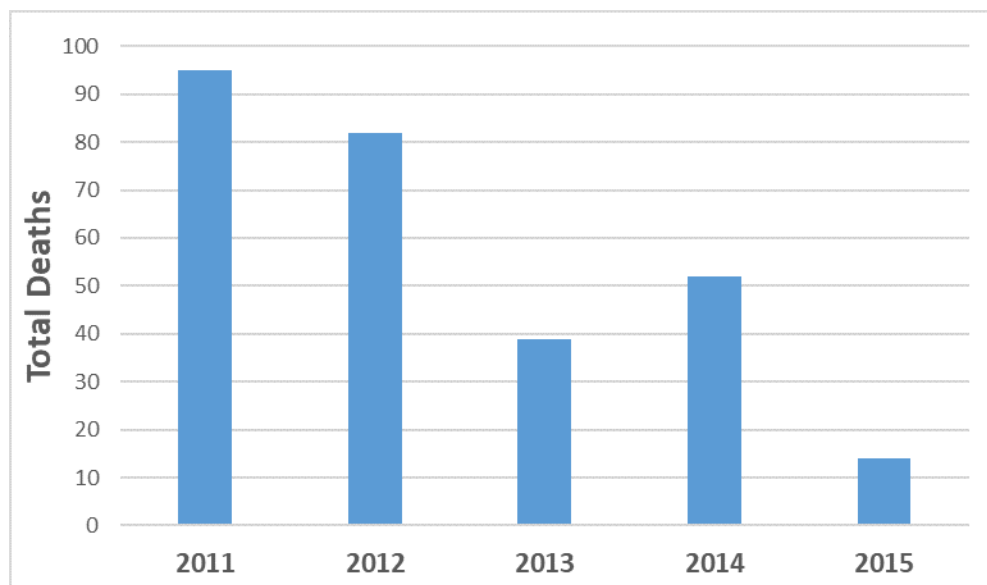


Figure 5. Armed conflict-related deaths in Chechnya by year, 2011–2015.³⁰⁵

B. ANALYSIS OF RUSSIA’S COUNTERINSURGENCY STRATEGY

The two Chechen wars provide a somewhat unique case in the study of counterinsurgency, because they occurred in a relatively short time span and had

³⁰³ Souleimanov and Aliyev, “Asymmetry of Values, Indigenous Forces, and Incumbent Success in Counterinsurgency,” 691.

³⁰⁴ Ibid.

³⁰⁵ Adapted from: Joshua Yaffa, “Putin’s Dragon: Is the ruler of Chechnya out of control?” *The New Yorker*, February 8, 2016, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2016/02/08/putins-dragon>; Caucasian Knot, “In 2014, There Were 525 Victims of Armed Conflict in Northern Caucasus,” January 31, 2015, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/30689/>.

contrasting outcomes. This section analyzes Russia's counterinsurgency strategy for both wars, looking at both the successes and failures.

1. Causes of Failure in the First War

By virtually any measure, Russia's counterinsurgency efforts in the First Chechen War failed miserably. In fact, very little can be found that is positive regarding Russia's performance. The story of the first war is one of a series of failures, both by the military at the strategic and tactical levels and by the political leaders.

From a military perspective, Russia's shortcomings hindered both the planning and execution of this operation. Kim and Blank point out that Russia failed from the very beginning to have a strategic counterinsurgency design.³⁰⁶ Russian military leadership treated the conflict as one of counter-terrorism rather than counterinsurgency, focusing nearly entirely on killing insurgents with little effort put into winning the Chechen population.³⁰⁷ Additionally, Russia ignored the local Chechen government,³⁰⁸ failing to provide support the very institutions that could help bring about peace. As a result, Chechnya experienced a massive breakdown in public order during the first war.³⁰⁹ To compound the error of poor strategy, Russia greatly underestimated the Chechen fighters. Russia expected to achieve a fairly easy victory and expected the resistance to fold quickly.³¹⁰

Russia brought into Chechnya a force poorly organized, trained, and equipped. Russian soldiers were unprepared and untrained in urban combat,³¹¹ comprising a force that Schaefer describes as full of "barely trained conscripts."³¹² Also, a RAND Corporation study found that coordination was virtually nonexistent among various Russian units and

³⁰⁶ Kim and Blank, "Insurgency and Counterinsurgency in Russia," 922.

³⁰⁷ Ibid.

³⁰⁸ Ibid.

³⁰⁹ Mark Kramer, "The Perils of Counterinsurgency: Russia's War in Chechnya," *International Security* 29, no. 3 (Winter 2004/2005): 6.

³¹⁰ Olikier, *Russia's Chechen War 1994-2000*, 9-13.

³¹¹ Ibid., 6-8.

³¹² Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 130.

security organizations, creating a tactical environment in which the Russians were fighting with no single, organized effort and in which intelligence sharing severely suffered.³¹³

Russia made another strategic blunder in its heavy reliance on indirect fire in the form of air and artillery strikes. Cohen states that this approach was the “wrong strategy for the type of warfare they faced in Chechnya” and that “Russian generals were using strategies that would be appropriate in a large-scale military operation with a clearly defined battlefield, but not for guerilla war in Chechnya.”³¹⁴ This strategic blunder impacted Russia’s counterinsurgency effort in two ways. First, Chechen insurgents exploited Russia’s reliance on indirect fire by staying close to Russian troops, thereby negating the effectiveness of bombardments.³¹⁵ Second, Russia’s indiscriminate use of firepower and the massive destruction it inflicted upon Chechen cities proved to be counterproductive, as it turned much of what little popular support Russia had over to the insurgents and helped fuel the radicalization that was occurring in Chechnya.³¹⁶

As a result of the above military shortcomings—lack of coordination, poor training, overuse of indiscriminate indirect fire—Russia lost thousands of soldiers due to fratricide. While the exact numbers of Russian casualties that resulted from fratricide cannot be ascertained, estimates attribute as much as 60 percent of Russia’s total casualties to friendly fire.³¹⁷ Oliker writes that poorly trained Russian troops “were at least as likely to hit a fellow Russian as they were the enemy.”³¹⁸

The largest political error made by Russia in the first war was in failing to take a comprehensive counterinsurgency approach, relying solely on military means to quell the insurgency. Russia’s leaders made no attempt facilitate the economic and social development of Chechnya. Chechnya was economically depressed prior to the war, but Russia’s scorched earth tactics “left Chechnya in a disastrous economic situation, in which

³¹³ Oliker, *Russia’s Chechen War 1994–2000*, 14–15.

³¹⁴ Cohen, *Russia’s Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus*, 26.

³¹⁵ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 129.

³¹⁶ Cohen, *Russia’s Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus*, 29.

³¹⁷ Oliker, *Russia’s Chechen War 1994–2000*, 16.

³¹⁸ Ibid.

people had only slim prospects for a bright future.”³¹⁹ As part of the war-ending Khasav-Yurt agreement, Russia promised to provide for reconstruction and supply economic aid to Chechnya.³²⁰ However, Russia failed to meet its obligations, ultimately refusing to pay the estimated \$300 million cost of reconstruction, and following the war, unemployment in Chechnya reached 80 percent.³²¹ Not only did Russia lose the military aspect of the conflict, it also neglected to make a reasonable effort to address legitimate grievances of the Chechens or to take measures designed to increase popular support.

2. Causes of Success in the Second War

From a military standpoint, Russia made some major adjustments for the second war and showed a dramatically increased tactical effectiveness. Russian forces entered Chechnya better prepared and trained than they were for the first war. Prior to mobilizing for war, the Russian army conducted training and exercises specifically designed to prepare them for the counterinsurgency operations in which they would soon take part.³²² At the unit and higher echelon-level, Russian forces exercised large-scale counterinsurgency and worked toward coordinated efforts among disparate units³²³—one of the major shortfalls in the first war. Russia’s preparations also bore fruit at the individual level. Although Russia still had a problem with poorly trained and performing conscript troops, the average soldier in Chechnya was of better quality and better equipped than his counterpart in the first war.³²⁴

Scholars have found a number of shortfalls in the Russian military, even in the second war. For example, Kramer writes of equipment deficiencies and archaic capabilities, noting that “the Russian military remains stuck in the pre-digital age,”³²⁵ and Cohen points out that despite the training efforts of the Russian army prior to the war,

³¹⁹ Cohen, *Russia’s Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus*, 36.

³²⁰ Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 89–93.

³²¹ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 49.

³²² Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen War 1994–2000*, 36–37.

³²³ Ibid.

³²⁴ Olikier, *Russia’s Chechen War 1994–2000*, 59–61.

³²⁵ Kramer, “Guerilla Warfare, Counterinsurgency and Terrorism in the North Caucasus,” 224.

soldiers were still insufficiently prepared for urban combat.³²⁶ However, while criticisms such as these are valid in absolute terms, in relative terms, the Russian military showed a marked improvement in the second war. This improvement is best indicated by the fact that Russian forces succeeded in taking control of Chechnya,³²⁷ something they were unable to accomplish in the previous war.

Although the military campaign succeeded in asserting Russian control over Chechen territory, the military dimension of the conflict cannot be given credit for counterinsurgency success. The Russian military effectively reduced the insurgency to a guerilla force capable only of relatively small-scale attacks, but it reached a virtual impasse by the early 2000s. Souleimanov and Aliyev write, “Having won the initial, rather conventional phase of the war, the Russian Army largely failed to achieve a clear-cut victory in the guerrilla phase that ensued.”³²⁸

The single most critical factor leading to Russia’s success was its strategy of Chechenization. Localizing the counterinsurgency enabled results that could not be obtained solely by military action. Ratelle and Souleimanov call localization a “game changer,” asserting that “it has helped to crush the core of the Chechen insurgency after years of largely indiscriminate and ineffective counterinsurgency operations carried out by Russian armed forces.”³²⁹ Galeotti calls the Kadyrovs “crucial instruments of Putin’s success in Chechnya.”³³⁰ Matejova writes that Russia could not have achieved decisive victory through military means, stating that localization “was an excellent solution and despite its shortcomings, it appears to be the best policy Putin could have chosen to pursue in Chechnya.”³³¹ Hughes calls Chechenization “one key pillar of the Russian counterinsurgency.”³³²

³²⁶ Cohen, *Russia’s Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus*, 44.

³²⁷ Ibid., 42.

³²⁸ Souleimanov and Aliyev, “Asymmetry of Values, Indigenous Forces, and Incumbent Success in Counterinsurgency,” 689.

³²⁹ Ratelle and Souleimanov, “A Perfect Counterinsurgency?” 1299.

³³⁰ Galeotti, *Russia’s Wars in Chechnya 1994–2009*, 84.

³³¹ Matejova “Russian ‘Chechenization’ and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya,” 24.

³³² Hughes, *Chechnya: From Nationalism to Jihad*, 120.

As a result of localization and with Kadyrov as a critical enabler, Russia also found a great deal of success in the information aspect of the conflict, effectively pushing a narrative that countered the insurgent ideology. As the insurgency increasingly shifted from a war for independence to part of the global *jihad*, Russia used this shift and the foreign influence that drove it to delegitimize the insurgency in the eyes of the Chechen populace. Through Kadyrov, Russia portrayed the insurgency as a threat to traditional Chechen culture and the radical Salafist and Wahhabist Islam ideology so prevalent in the insurgency as a threat to the traditional Sufi Islam of Chechnya.³³³ This strategy was more effective than trying to convince the Chechens of Russian legitimacy. It helped build up Kadyrov's legitimacy and further supported the Chechenization strategy. Schaefer notes that this counter-ideology approach "transformed the conflict from a rigid inter-ethnic war (Chechnya fighting Russia for independence) into a civil war between Chechens with differing ideologies."³³⁴ Once this split occurred and, along with localization, made the counterinsurgency a conflict between two Chechen factions, the much stronger, more well-resourced side—led by Kadyrov—achieved the victory.

The two wars—and the Russian military's destructive methods—left Chechnya in a shambles. Russia has put much effort into assisting the economic development of the country, funneling huge sums³³⁵ of money for reconstruction through Kadyrov.³³⁶ Although pervasive corruption throughout all levels of the Chechen government has caused much of this money to be misappropriated,³³⁷ some positive results are evident. Russel observes that "Ramzan [Kadirov] has achieved tangible success in rebuilding Chechnya's shattered infrastructure,"³³⁸ and Dannreuther and March point out that, due to

³³³ International Crisis Group, "The North Caucasus: The Challenges of Integration (II), Islam, the Insurgency and Counterinsurgency," *Europe Report* no. 221 (October 19, 2012): 12–13.

³³⁴ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 211–212.

³³⁵ Fuller reports that between 2002 and 2012 Russia appropriated \$7.8 billion for Chechnya's post-war reconstruction. Liz Fuller, "Kadyrov's Chechnya Appears Exempt from Russian Funding Cuts," July 30, 2017, <https://www.rferl.org/a/caucasus-report-kadyrov-chechnya-exempt-funding-cuts/28648698.html>.

³³⁶ Matejova "Russian 'Chechenization' and the Prospects for a Lasting Peace in Chechnya," 18.

³³⁷ Schaefer, *The Insurgency in Chechnya and the North Caucasus*, 255–256.

³³⁸ John Russel, "Ramzan Kadyrov: The Indigenous Key to Success in Putin's Chechenization Strategy?" *Nationalities Papers* 36, no. 4 (September 2008): 671.

reconstruction efforts, the Chechen economy is now giving indicators of improvement.³³⁹ Despite optimistic signs, Chechnya still has the second highest unemployment rate in the Russian Federation, only ahead of neighboring Ingushetia,³⁴⁰ and remains poor compared to the rest of Russia. Furthermore, most of Chechnya's economic progress has occurred subsequent to its pacification, making reconstruction and development not a significant factor in the defeat of the insurgency.

C. CONCLUSION

Russia entered the First Chechen War unprepared and conducted a poorly planned and poorly executed military operation characterized by lack of coordination and lack of tactical proficiency. The war ended in 1996 with the Russian military humiliated and defeated and with none of the problems for which Russia went to war solved. Russia's counterinsurgency failure only strengthened the Chechen insurgency.

Russia began the Second Chechen War with an increased resolve and achieved a dramatically different outcome by 2009. Russia's success stems partly from a number of adjustments made in its military. Russian forces in Chechnya, despite a number of shortcomings, were better trained and equipped than their counterparts in the first war. Additionally, Russian forces displayed a greater degree of coordination and sound tactics. However, military improvements alone were insufficient to achieve counterinsurgency success. While the Russian military achieved its territorial objectives, it essentially reached a stalemate with the insurgency, unable to effectively deal with small, decentralized pockets of guerilla fighters who sought to employ terrorist tactics.

The turning point in the conflict and the primary key to Russia's success began when Russia fully implemented its strategy of Chechenization, localizing counterinsurgency functions. Russia's cooption of Ramzan Kadyrov and Chechen militias that accompanied him destroyed the insurgency in a way that the Russian army could not. Chechenization also enabled a counter-ideology information campaign to drive a wedge

³³⁹ Dannreuther and March, "Chechnya: Has Moscow Won?" 98.

³⁴⁰ Caucasian Knot, "Ingushetia and Chechnya are Russia's Leaders in Unemployment Rate," November 11, 2017, <http://www.eng.kavkaz-uzel.eu/articles/41447/>.

between the insurgency and Chechen society, driving many Chechens to Kadyrov's side and reframing the Chechen view of the insurgency as a greater threat to Chechen interests than Russia. At the tactical level, Chechen security forces found much greater success in collecting intelligence and rooting out insurgents than Russian security forces had. At the political level, Kadyrov, by using local resources and by having far more legitimacy than the Moscow government in the eyes of the Chechen people, was able to assert control over Chechnya in a way that had eluded Russia. When Russia declared victory and withdrew from Chechnya in 2009, Chechnya had been largely pacified. Since then, violence has continued to decrease with no indications of a resurgent militancy.

Despite Russia's overall success, it made grave errors and accepted some negative trade-offs. Through its disregard for civilian casualties and collateral damage, the Russian military clearly violated internationally accepted laws of war. Russia has cast a tremendous amount of support behind the Kadyrov regime, which has developed a reputation for corruption, brutality, and disregard for human rights. These things have arguably been counterproductive from a counterinsurgency standpoint.³⁴¹ However, the fact that Russia still achieved overall success despite the serious flaws in its counterinsurgency demonstrates the efficacy of the things that it did right.

³⁴¹ Many scholars take this position. For example, Cohen calls Russia's brutality and lack of regard for civilian life counterproductive, as it contributed to the radicalization of the insurgency. Cohen, *Russia's Counterinsurgency in North Caucasus*, 29. Also, Schaefer asserts that Kadyrov's rule by fear degrades the ability to win the hearts and minds of the populace. Octavian Manea and Robert Schaefer, "The Russian COIN Campaign in North Caucasus," *Small Wars Journal*, June 28, 2012, <http://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/the-russian-coin-campaign-in-north-caucasus>.

V. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSION

A. EVALUATION OF THE HYPOTHESES

To evaluate the four hypotheses put forth in Chapter I effectively, it is essential to note how the Moro insurgency has changed since the 1970s when the MNLF began armed insurrection. The insurgencies in both Mindanao and Chechnya followed similar trajectories. As shown in Figure 6, both insurgencies began as ethno-nationalist quests for independence and continued as struggles for autonomy within a specific territorial region. At a certain point, both insurgencies became infused with foreign influences. Whether a product of foreign fighters, foreign ideology, or both, this influence induced a qualitative shift that changed the insurgencies into Pan-Islamic insurgencies, aligning the goals of insurgent groups with the global *jihadist* movement and expanding the focus of the insurgencies beyond the original territorial objectives.



Figure 6. Trajectory of insurgencies in Mindanao and Chechnya.

Recognizing the shift in the insurgencies has two implications for this study. First, in the ethno-nationalist phase of insurgency, insurgent groups in both the Philippines and Chechnya received widespread support from the populaces in their respective areas. Support from the local populaces dropped off in both cases as the insurgencies transitioned to Pan-Islamic insurgencies. Second, from a counterinsurgency perspective, the strategies and methods that may have been effective against ethno-nationalist insurgents may be less than ideal and even ineffective against global *jihadists*.

1. Hypothesis 1: Inadequate Resource Commitment

While specific shortfalls in counterinsurgency resources have been pointed out, this hypothesis does not adequately explain the GRP's failure to end the Mindanao insurgency thus far. At certain points throughout the GRP's nearly fifty-year counterinsurgency efforts in Mindanao, resource shortfalls likely degraded the ability to conduct operations effectively, specifically during times when the conflict against communist insurgents was given priority. However, these periods had limited duration and did not occur in recent years. The GRP left a significant portion of its armed forces in Mindanao after fighting with the MILF ceased, not only as a safeguard against a renewed outbreak of MILF-led violence, but also to combat the splinter groups and ISIS-linked organizations. These troop levels have only increased in response to incidents such as the Marawi battle and after declaration of martial law in Mindanao. Furthermore, the U.S. has for nearly two decades provided a great deal of counterinsurgency support to the GRP in the form of money, intelligence support, arms, equipment, and advisors.

Regarding the commitment of non-military resources, Chapter III describes how the GRP has committed a significant amount of funds toward the development of Mindanao and has received billions of dollars in foreign aid for Mindanao's development. Mindanao, and specifically the insurgency-infested areas, still economically lags behind most of the rest of the Philippines, and the overall development goals have yet to come to fruition. While a specific figure for "adequate" funding is impossible to identify, Mindanao's economic situation could potentially raise questions as to whether the GRP has appropriated sufficient funds for development. However, the Chechnya case shows that economic development is not necessarily a prerequisite for peace. While Russia's development efforts have made progress in Chechnya, Chechnya can still be considered underdeveloped in many areas, and most of the tangible results of development efforts occurred after the insurgency had ended. Economic development and its benefits to a society can certainly help stabilize a war-torn region and probably go a long way in preventing a relapse into insurgency, but an active insurgency acts as a tremendous stumbling block to development. Although the underdevelopment of the Muslim areas of Mindanao has been a source of grievance for insurgent groups, the peace with the MNLF

and MILF demonstrates that tangible development progress is not necessarily a requirement for peace. Furthermore, in Chechnya, progress in economic development occurred mostly after the insurgency ended, showing that, at least in some cases, development follows peace rather than causes peace.

2. Hypothesis 2: Political Factors/Failed Peace Agreements

An assertion that peace agreements did not matter in the overall counterinsurgency would be inaccurate. A peace agreement with the MNLF, the largest Mindanao insurgent group studied in this thesis, ended the MNLF's status as an insurgent group. A pending peace agreement with the MILF, although not formally enacted into law at this point, has reduced MILF-GRP violence to virtually zero since 2012 and enabled the MILF to take steps toward integration into the political process. However, the lack of a peace agreement cannot be pinpointed as a significant factor for explaining the ongoing Pan-Islamic phase of the insurgency. As discussed in Chapter III, the fracturing of the insurgency into multiple groups, the radical ideology of the current insurgency, and the proclivity for the use of terrorism render peace agreements with these groups unlikely and an unfeasible goal to pursue. Even though President Duterte indicated in November 2016 that he may be open to negotiations with the ASG,³⁴² the GRP has given no indication that it is seeking peace negotiations as part of its counterinsurgency strategy.

In Chechnya, Russia ended its counterinsurgency without reaching a peace agreement with the insurgents. Furthermore, Russia did not seek a peace agreement as part of its counterinsurgency strategy. The evidence from both the Philippine and Chechen cases lead to the conclusion that peace agreements may be helpful in resolving insurgencies, but they are not necessarily a prerequisite for counterinsurgency success. In Mindanao, peace agreements are not a significant factor in current counterinsurgency campaign.

³⁴² Pia Ranada, "Duterte: I'm Ready to Talk to Abu Sayyaf," November 25, 2016, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/153619-duterte-ready-talk-abu-sayyaf>.

3. Hypothesis 3: Lack of a Coherent Counterinsurgency Strategy

Attributing the GRP's lack of counterinsurgency success to the absence of a coherent counterinsurgency strategy fails to provide a satisfactory explanation in light of the evidence. At various times, the GRP's counterinsurgency strategy did indeed appear incoherent and probably hampered the ability of the military and government agencies to act in a unified manner. For example, the oscillation between policies of "all-out war" and "all-out peace" in the early 2000s undoubtedly created difficulties for those tasked with counterinsurgency functions at the strategic level. However, the GRP appears to have overcome any problems it may have had in strategic coherence. As the lead counterinsurgency organization for the GRP, the AFP's 2010 Internal Peace and Security Plan and 2017 Development Support and Security Plan outline a logical and coherent counterinsurgency strategy that takes a whole of government approach to counterinsurgency. In 2010, Beaulieu wrote of the Philippines that its "counterinsurgency strategy inadequately integrates political and military measures."³⁴³ Aside from the separate question of whether or not the GRP's strategy is the correct one, Beaulieu's criticism appears to no longer apply.

4. Hypothesis 4: Over-centralization of the Counterinsurgency

The evidence shows that the hypothesis that the GRP's failure to localize counterinsurgency efforts has prevented the GRP from ending the insurgency provides the best explanation for the GRP's lack of counterinsurgency success. Counterinsurgency localization was the most significant key to Russia's counterinsurgency success and also happens to be a counterinsurgency principle conspicuously absent in the GRP's counterinsurgency efforts. When the hypotheses are applied to both Russia's and the GRP's counterinsurgencies (see Table 1), the two countries have a sharp contrast in how they did or did not use localization, which presents a reasonable explanation for the contrasting outcomes. The next section takes a deeper look at how localization applies to this study.

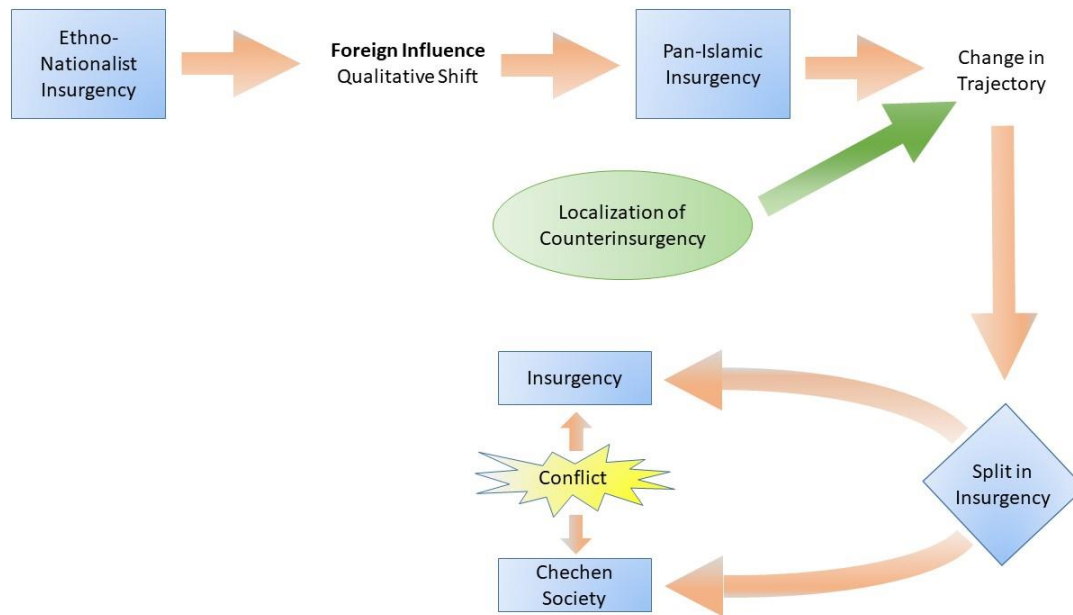
³⁴³ James A. Beaulieu, "Protracted State Insurgencies: Counterinsurgency Lessons from Sri Lank, Indonesia, the Philippines, and Colombia" (master's thesis, Georgetown University, 2010), 13.

Table 1. Side-by-side comparison of the four hypotheses applied to the Philippines and Russia

Hypothesis	GRP	Russia
1. Resource Shortfalls	Not a significant factor.	Not a significant factor.
2. Peace Agreements	Key for peace with specific groups; not a significant factor in the post-MILF phase of the insurgency.	Not a significant factor.
3. Strategy	Periodically an issue; not a significant factor since 2010.	Serious shortfall during first war; significantly improved during second war.
4. Localization	Not implemented in a meaningful way.	Cornerstone of Russia's counterinsurgency strategy in Chechnya beginning in 2005.

B. THE LOCALIZATION EXPLANATION

Figure 6 depicted a commonality in the trajectory of the insurgencies in Chechnya and Mindanao. In Mindanao, Figure 6 still applies today. However, the two situations ended up diverging. Figure 7 depicts how Russia used localization to alter the course of the insurgency, forcing the trajectory of the Chechen insurgency to change in a way different from the Philippine case.



Russia's localization of the counterinsurgency induced a split in the insurgency, ultimately changing the insurgency from conflict between Russia and Chechnya to a conflict between Chechnya and the insurgents.

Figure 7. Effect of localization on the Chechen insurgency.

Just as the Russian military reached a virtual stalemate prior to the full implementation of the localization strategy, the Philippine counterinsurgency appears to have reached a similar point of diminishing military returns. The AFP and other security forces routinely target insurgent leaders and achieve tactical successes, but there is little indication that the insurgent threat from ISIS-linked groups in Mindanao is diminishing. While the transformation of the insurgency from an ethno-nationalist insurgency to a radical Pan-Islamic insurgency poses significant challenges to the GRP, it may also present an opportunity. In Chechnya, the permeation of outside influences within the insurgency began to degrade the insurgency's widespread popular support. When Russia localized the counterinsurgency, it reframed the entire conflict, effectively facilitating a split between the insurgency and Chechen populace. This "Chechenization" of the conflict also deepened a rift within the insurgency itself, driving numerous insurgents to the side of the Chechen government. The GRP could potentially take advantage of a similar situation in Mindanao. While the MNLF and MILF garnered the enthusiastic support of the populace in certain

areas of Mindanao, the current crop of ISIS-affiliated insurgent groups do not enjoy high levels of popular support. However, a local populace that does not support an insurgency is very different from a local populace that actively works against an insurgency. If the GRP can successfully turn over counterinsurgency functions to empowered local leaders, then it may be able to better exploit a rift between the insurgency and society than it has been able to accomplish until now. Also, as in the case of Chechnya, such a strategy is likely to push the counterinsurgency past the point of stalemate by pressuring and degrading insurgent groups beyond what the AFP alone has achieved.

The Philippines has certain unique characteristics that could pose obstacles to true counterinsurgency localization, and the GRP would undoubtedly find a Chechenization-type of strategy in Mindanao to be challenging. First, unlike Chechnya, Mindanao has significant ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity. For this reason, it is highly unlikely that the GRP would be able to install a single, Kadyrov-like figure through whom the GRP could prosecute counterinsurgency functions by proxy. The chance of such a figure achieving legitimacy among all the various groups is small.³⁴⁴ The GRP would probably have to coopt multiple local leaders to carry out its objectives in all the areas affected by the insurgency.

On the other hand, many of the insurgent-infested areas already contain armed groups, such as the MILF, that are not currently in a state of conflict with the GRP. The MILF has distanced itself from the Abu Sayyaf and denounced terrorism. Also, the MILF has clashed with ISIS-linked groups within its territory,³⁴⁵ even receiving limited support from the AFP.³⁴⁶ Given these circumstances, the MILF appears to be a promising target for cooption as part of a GRP localization strategy. Although this thesis argued that formal ratification of the GRP-MILF peace agreement by the Philippine legislature would not

³⁴⁴ Despite attempts to establish a Moro identity that would unify the Muslims of the Southern Philippines, ethnic and tribal identity has generally kept the Moro identity from becoming more than a loosely unifying force.

³⁴⁵ Agence France-Presse, “10 MILF Fighters Dead in Clashes with ISIS-linked Groups, August 23, 2017, <https://www.rappler.com/nation/179780-moro-islamic-liberation-front-isis-alarm-philippines>.

³⁴⁶ Francis Wakefield and Agence France-Presse, “Gov’t Troops Join Forces with MILF in Fighting IS-inspired BIFF,” September 7, 2017, <https://news.mb.com.ph/2017/09/07/govt-troops-join-forces-with-milf-in-fighting-is-inspired-biff/>.

meaningfully impact the overall counterinsurgency, such an agreement could possibly facilitate counterinsurgency localization efforts by helping foster the level of trust necessary for the GRP to turn over counterinsurgency functions to the MILF.

C. POSSIBLE PREREQUISITE CONDITIONS FOR LOCALIZATION

Analysis of Russia's Chechenization strategy also identifies a set of conditions that likely must be met for counterinsurgency localization to be effective. The first of these conditions is a split between the insurgency and the local populace. The second is a split between local elites, with one set of elites supporting the insurgency and the other set opposing it. It appears probable that one or both of these conditions are necessary to facilitate localization, whether the conditions are provoked as part of a counterinsurgency strategy or occur through other stimuli. In the Chechnya case, Russia helped create both conditions, a split between the populace and the insurgency through information warfare and a split between elites through the cooption of the Kadyrovs. In the early days of the First Chechen War and prior to the qualitative shift depicted in Figure 6, these conditions did not exist, and it is difficult to envision localization as a feasible strategy then.

Likewise, neither condition existed in Mindanao during the ethno-nationalist phase of insurgency. When the MNLF and MILF were the face of the insurgency, no local entity existed in insurgent-infested areas with whom the GRP could turn over counterinsurgency functions and have a reasonable expectation that that entity would work toward the GRP's interests. At that point in the history of the conflict, a localization strategy would have been a poor strategy. The evidence shows that the GRP ultimately employed the correct strategy during the ethno-nationalist phase, using military force and political accommodation to achieve peace with the MNLF and MILF. However, considering that the new insurgent groups do not seek any accommodation other than being recognized as an Islamic State under the global Caliphate, the GRP needs a different approach. The current Pan-Islamic insurgency in Mindanao has little support from the local populace, and the local power brokers, such as the leadership of the MILF, either passively or actively oppose the ISIS-linked insurgent groups. With these two conditions met, localization becomes a more logical approach and likely to produce similar results as in Chechnya.

D. CONCLUSION

This thesis suggests neither that Russia conducted a perfect counterinsurgency nor implies that the Chechen counterinsurgency is a model counterinsurgency that should be emulated in every way. However, the numerous similarities between the situation in Chechnya and the situation in Mindanao make the Chechen case a valuable tool for comparative study. In addition, Russia's ultimate success in ending the Chechen counterinsurgency makes the Chechnya case useful for examining the factors that led to that success and how they may apply to the Philippines.

A comparison of the application of the hypotheses to the Russian counterinsurgency and the Philippine counterinsurgency reveals a sharp contrast in how Russia and the GRP applied the principle of localization to their counterinsurgency efforts. While Russia's localization strategy produced dramatic results and arguably constituted the single most important factor in its eventual counterinsurgency success, the GRP has notably failed to implement localization in a meaningful way in Mindanao. The evidence from case studies of the Philippines and Chechnya supports the inference that the GRP's failure to localize the counterinsurgency following the transformation of the insurgency into a fractured, global jihad-linked conflict is a significant causal factor in the GRP's failure to achieve ultimate success thus far, despite successfully ending the MNLF and MILF-led insurgencies.

The result of this study has two implications for counterinsurgency efforts in Mindanao. First, although the current insurgency is linked with and grew out of the previous phases of insurgency, it must be recognized as having changed in its structure and objectives. As such, counterinsurgency planners must look at the Mindanao insurgency holistically rather than simply as combating a specific, named organization and must understand that the methods and the strategies that were effective in previous phases of the insurgency will not achieve the same results in the current conflict. Second, the importance of localization should be recognized. Insurgencies and counterinsurgencies comprise a highly complex system, and this thesis does not naively suggest that any single factor provides a "silver bullet" that guarantees success. However, the Chechen case demonstrates that a strategy based upon counterinsurgency localization can effectively turn around a

stalled counterinsurgency; therefore, the implementation of a localization strategy in Mindanao is worth consideration.

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